Guitar MAGAZINE

OCT 2019
ISSUE 373
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- PRE-CBS STRAT SHOOTOUT
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- INSIDE GUITAR CENTER'S VINTAGE VAULT

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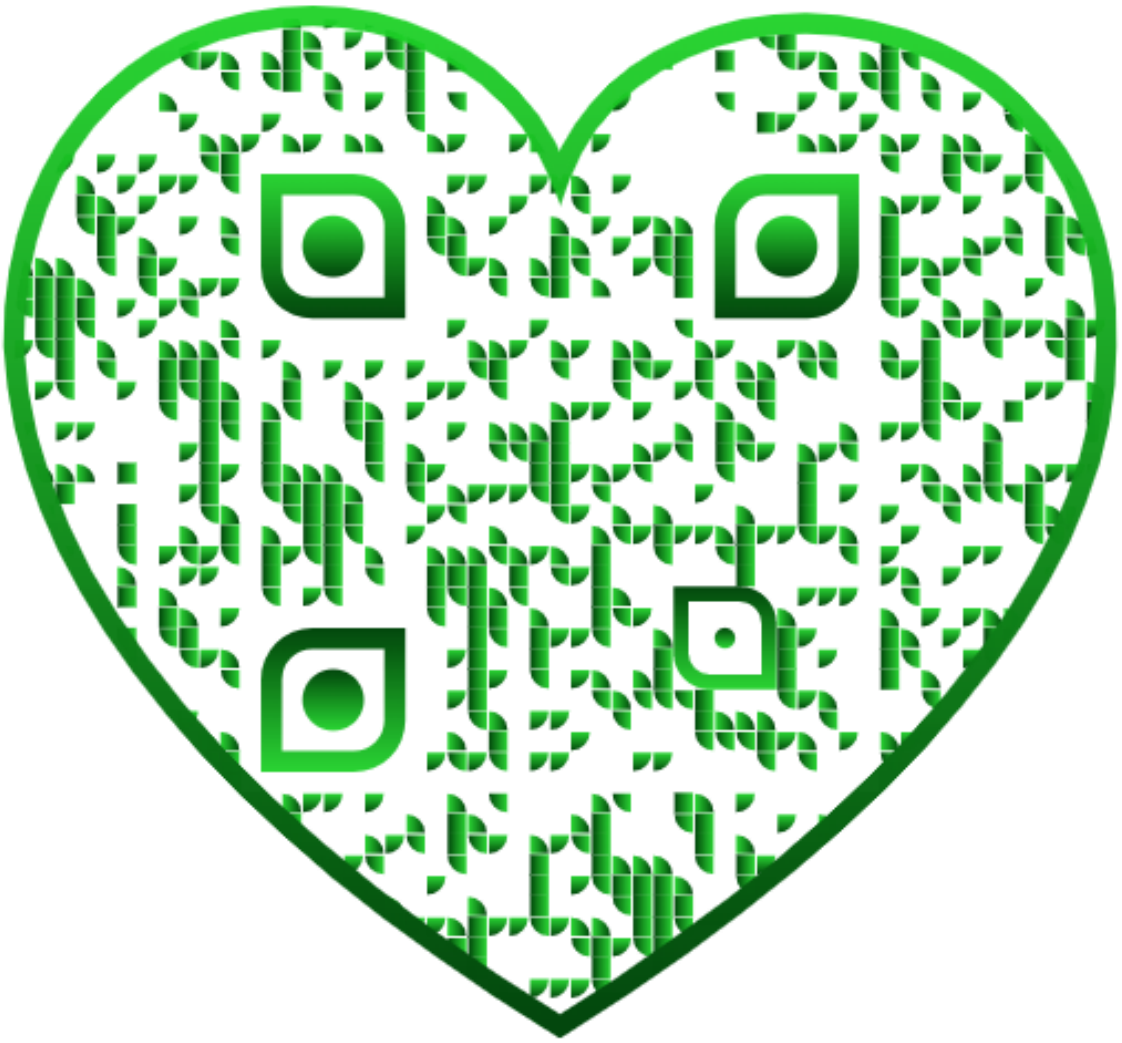

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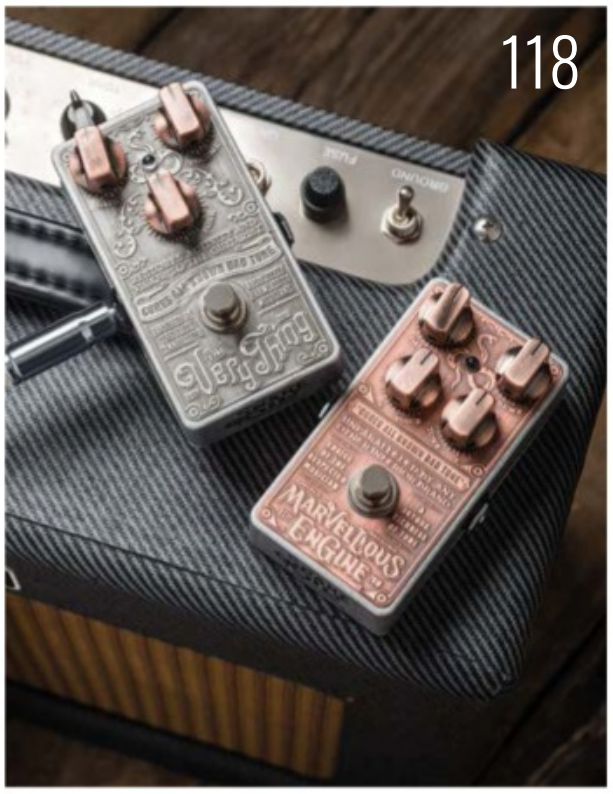

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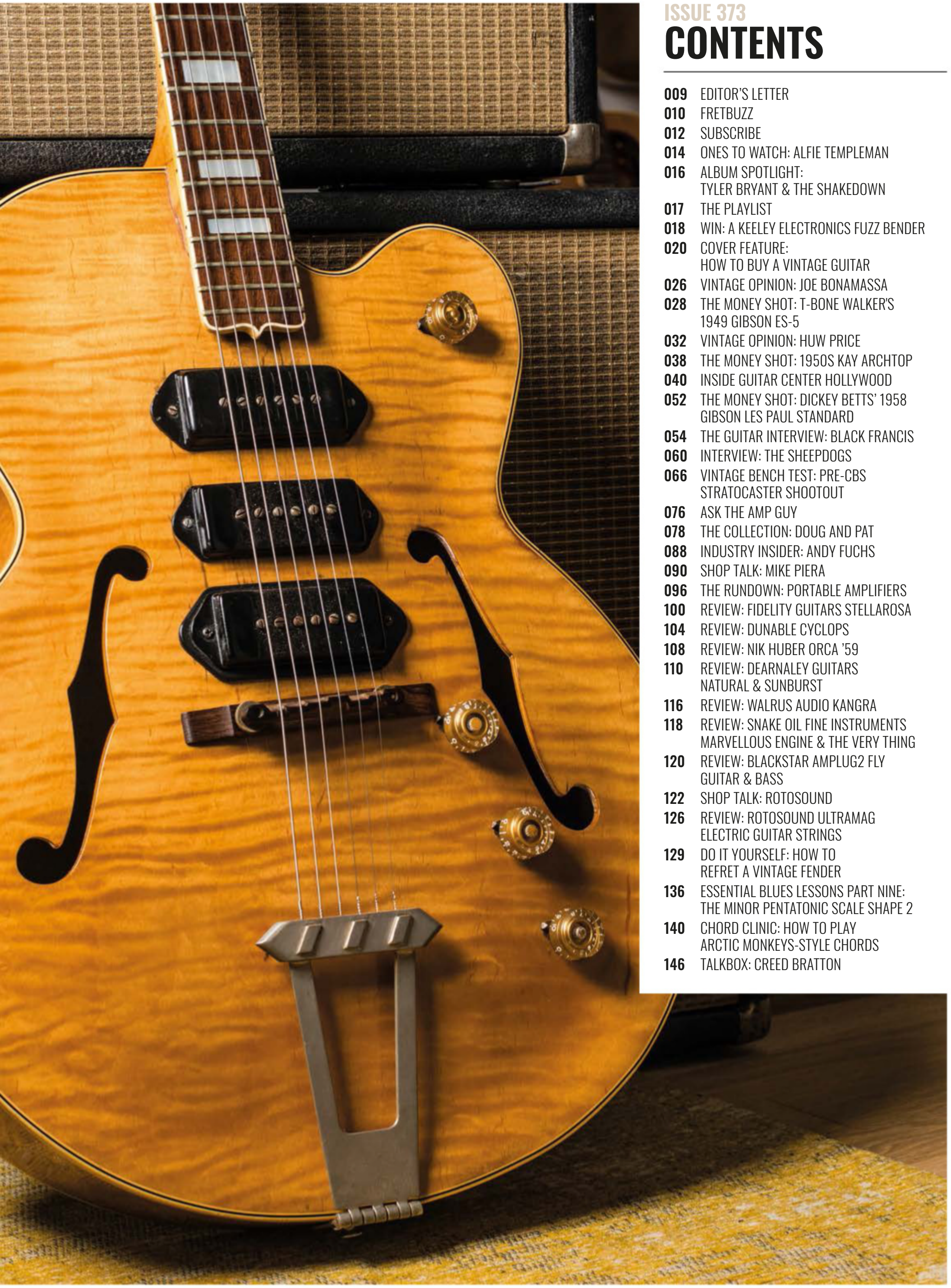

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EDITOR'S LETTER

A CERTAIN VINTAGE

Although I don't currently own any vintage gear aside from a couple of old pedals, that doesn't stop me spending an unhealthy amount of time gazing longingly at pictures and videos of golden era Gibsons and Fenders, planning hypothetical purchases and zeroing in on the years in which my favourite guitars had the best pickups and neck shapes. Familiar story? It's certainly not just me – and the relentless allure of vintage gear shows no sign of waning any time soon.

Sure, there are plenty of decidedly average and downright bad vintage guitars out there and the year of an instrument's manufacture is not a stone-cold guarantee of quality. But having been lucky enough to spend a fair chunk of time in recording studios with vintage gear over the years, there's definitely something special about a well-sorted old guitar that makes dialling in a great tone incredibly straightforward.

It's a phenomenon I've discussed with several engineers: great vintage guitars seem almost to produce themselves and sit perfectly in a band mix with very minimal additional EQ or sonic fairy dust required.

In this month's magazine, we celebrate all things vintage. Along with a smorgasbord of beautifully photographed gear, you'll find expert buying tips – featuring none other than Joe Bonamassa and a host of other vintage-guitar gurus – and we also try to get to the bottom of whether the wood, hardware or pickups are the biggest factor in the pursuit of old-school guitar sounds.

It's not all old news; we also check out some of the hottest new gear that the industry has to offer, from the likes of Fidelity and Blackstar, and speak to guitar players and industry figures who are making waves in the here and now. Get in touch if there are any players or brands you'd like us to cover and don't forget to head to *Guitar.com* for your daily dose of guitar goodness. See you next month!

Chris Vinnicombe
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chris@guitar.com

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I'm writing to congratulate you on how diverse your artist coverage has been of late. All too often, the mainstream guitar press seems obsessed with the 'boutique blues' brigade and honestly, it's all a bit yawn-inducing. It's good to see artists of various genders who are under 40 years of age and not playing an endless stream of pentatonic licks without pausing for breath.

BILL WILSON, VIA EMAIL

IF YOU DON'T LOVE IT, LET IT GO

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I was reading your article on *Guitar.com* about Hank Marvin selling his beloved 1957 Stratocaster, simply because he wasn't playing it much any more and it struck me as such a positive and good way to think about gear. So many of us hoard guitars that we barely even pick up and they end up sat in cases not really doing anything – wouldn't it be better for everyone if we just got rid of them instead and let them go to someone who is actually going to play and love the instrument in question? As a result, I've made a new rule for myself – if I don't pick up one of my guitars for six months, it's going straight on Reverb, as I obviously don't need it. Plus, it has the added benefit of giving me space to buy more new ones!

PHIL LANG, VIA EMAIL

THE KIDS CAN PLAY

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I watched with a mixture of interest and dismay the various videos that have been circulating online recently showing Gibson destroying their unsold and factory-second guitars. While I understand that Gibson claimed the Firebird X guitars contained dangerous electronic components and that the bandsawing of guitars that fail QC checks is a common industry practice, it really got me thinking that surely in this age of increasing resource scarcity, there must be a better way to repurpose these instruments in a way that saves them from simply getting destroyed?

Given the sorry state of musical education in schools these days, it would be a good thing if guitar companies simply removed their branding from these factory seconds and donated them to school music departments. If the guitar is structurally sound, a kid who's learning guitar for the first time isn't going to care about minor finishing defects or similar issues that a buyer would understandably not want. It's food for thought…

DOUG HOPE, VIA EMAIL

MODERN LIFE IN MONOCHROME

Dear *Guitar*, I read with interest your September 2019 cover story on the new Fender Vintera guitars and noted that The Big F has revived some of its sexiest shades of custom colour. This got me thinking… why are cars such boring colours these days? The highways in Leo Fender's California must have been full of open-top Cadillacs and Buicks in Shoreline Gold, Surf Green, Lake Placid Blue and the like. Yet these days, all you see is white, silver and the occasional (boring) metallic dark green. Where did all the cool car colours go?

PAUL JONES, VIA EMAIL

My wife thinks I'm nuts for taking up the guitar in my 50s! She heard me play with a band for the first time – I suck by the way – and she was shocked! I said: "What the hell do think I've been doing in the basement for the last three years!?"

DAN ROBERTSON, VIA FACEBOOK

I saw The Sheepdogs as support for Rival Sons in Newcastle, UK. My type of music! Loved Jimmy's playing style and mannerisms and playing together with Ewan, they blew me away. Brilliant!

SINATSAKIS, VIA TWITTER

Proud to say, I own prototype number one of the Fidelity Guitars Josh Leonard model that Dave Grohl played for his secret *NME Club* gig. From little acorns!

DRAGO ROSSO, VIA FACEBOOK

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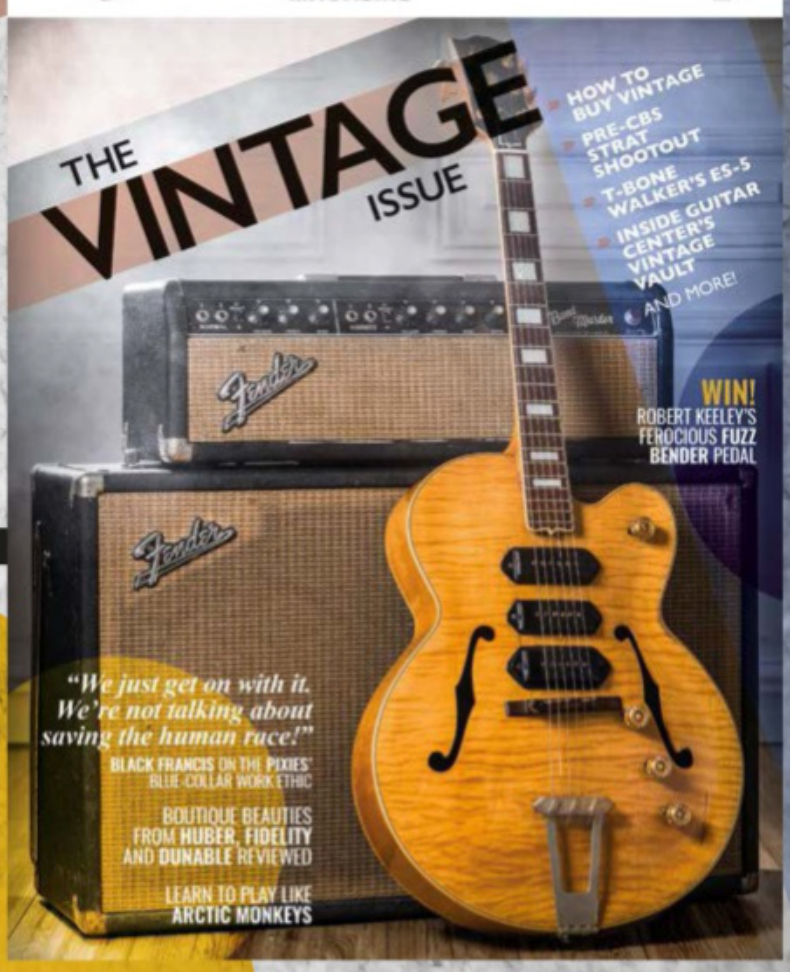

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“MY DAD COLLECTED GUITARS FOR YEARS AND THERE WAS NO WAY I WASN’T GONNA PICK UP ONE OF THEM, BEING A CURIOUS SIX-YEAR-OLD! I JUST STARTED TO LOVE THEM MORE AND MORE”

ONES TO WATCH

ALFIE TEMPLEMAN @ALFIETEMPLEMAN

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The multi-instrumental indie upstart on how it all started, his recent penchant for R&B and why guitars are cooler than pianos…

Bedfordshire-born Alfie Templeman recently released his anticipated sophomore EP, *Sunday Morning Cereal*. Whereas his previous offering, *Like An Animal*, drew inspiration from the American West Coast and channelled Mac DeMarco and Weezer, this new release pulls inspiration from R&B music that he was introduced to by close friends, stating that *Sunday Morning Cereal* "was made for my mates, really".

At just 16 years old, the standard of Templeman's musicianship belies his age – he played every instrument on the EP, with guitar chops even the most accomplished players would be envious of. Here, he tells us how the lyrics of Bob Dylan aided his early musicianship, why he refuses to succumb to video-game culture and why guitars are so much cooler than pianos.…

What first drew you to guitar?
"My dad collected a tonne of guitars for years and there was no way I wasn't gonna pick up one of them, being the curious six-year-old that I was! I just started to love them more and more after that."

When did you begin songwriting and who were your early influences?
"I started songwriting when I was about seven or eight. I first got into poetry and lyrics and used to write while going on holiday in the car to pass time. My first influences were Bob Dylan and Rush."

How has your songwriting developed?
"My songwriting feels more natural nowadays. I think that at the start I was still finding my own style, writing new things every day helped me to develop that, and over time I've been able pick out what sets me aside from other people."

Your debut EP channels Mac DeMarco, Weezer and Californian styles, whereas *Sunday Morning Cereal* feels more groove driven. Was this a conscious decision?
"Yeah, groove was something that I always wanted to cover but wasn't brave enough to do on my first EP. I needed more time to become tighter as a drummer and singer, and *Stop Thinking (About Me*) was that first big move. Also, at the end of 2018, a lot of my friends were playing cool R&B tracks at parties and meet-ups, so I realised that this kinda music connected with not only me but my generation of people, my school. You could say *Sunday Morning Cereal* was made for my mates, really."

Your guitar playing belies your age. How did you come to develop such a mature sound at such a young age?
"Thanks! Well, I don't play video games or anything and people tend to spend hours a day playing them. Instead, I'm sat at home playing guitar and improving not just my ability but also my technique."

Is the guitar your go-to instrument when you first start writing a song?
"Always. It's the riff-master, the chord-master, makes your ideas always sound amazing. I'll pick up my Stratocaster, plug into my interface and demo an idea. Two hours later, the same demo will be 80 per cent of a finished song! I always add stuff like piano in later. I know piano is also a common instrument for writing songs, but I've never been a fan of that. You can bend notes and all kinds of cool stuff on a guitar, you have more creative freedom than on a piano."

What guitars and amplifiers are you currently using?
"For electric guitars I'm using my good old Fenders. I switch between an American Performer Stratocaster and an American Performer Jazzmaster. Acoustic wise, I'm using a Faith Venus electro-acoustic. For amplifiers I use the Fender Champion 100-watt. Does the job brilliantly!"

With your new EP gathering plenty of high-level praise, what's next for Alfie Templeman?
"Another bunch of songs are in the works, so they'll most likely be out before 2020. A bunch of gigs are set to be announced very soon, too, so come see us shredding it up on stage!"

***Sunday Morning Cereal* by Alfie Templeman is out now via Chess Club**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

TYLER BRYANT & THE SHAKEDOWN TRUTH AND LIES

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The US guitar-slinger picks out the top guitar moments from his latest album, *Truth And Lies*

Tyler Bryant is one of the hottest young players in blues-rock. His third album with The Shakedown sees the 28-year-old Texan flex his muscles as a lead player while developing his songwriting chops. Here, he dissects his top guitar tracks from *Truth And Lies*…

RIDE

"I wanted the guitar tone to sound like you shook up some Texan and Mississippi dirt in a jar together… I used a Dallas Arbiter fuzz with my D'Angelico Deluxe DC to cover the TX tones on this one. I overdubbed the chorus with an old Danelectro to add a touch of that Mississippi juke joint magic."

SHAPE I'M IN

"I chose to use my Custom Shop '59 Telecaster (Mary Dow) for the bones of this one. There's nowhere to hide when you're playing a Tele. In my opinion, they bring out the truth in just about every guitarist. I wanted that honesty to be heard in every element of this song. In the intro, I love that you can hear the 60-cycle hum of the Princeton Reverb I was using. For the solo, I used my H/S Strat, 'The Judge'. It's got a Tele pickup in the neck and an EVH humbucker in the bridge. I got called for jury duty a couple of years ago and received the guitar right after the last court date. That's why it's called The Judge."

DRIVE ME MAD

"This song sounds and feels like a classic Shakedown jam to me. I used a Princeton Reverb, a Fender Champ, and a Square Amps radio amp for this one. I drove all three amps to the brink with my Rodenberg TB Drive and my main Shell Pink Strat. The tones on this song are just downright rude."

OUT THERE

"This is by far one of my favourite moments on the record. I recorded this tune on my 1931 National Duolian resonator. I love that the recording of this song stayed true to how I wrote it. It's all out in the open. The solo was my Telecaster (Mary Dow) plugged into a '63 Princeton with a TB Drive and an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail reverb. Space and simplicity were key."

COULDN'T SEE THE FIRE

"This was an important track for *Truth And Lies*. It took on a new life in the studio once The Shakedown got ahold of it. Although Graham (Whitford) and I are total guitar nerds, we wanted the songs to be the main focus… that said, when a song begs for big guitar solo, we don't shy away. Graham takes the first solo before the last chorus and it's one of my favourite moments on the record. He was totally in the zone. Recording the outro solo was so incredibly therapeutic for me. I can always tell I was playing from the right place when I finish a solo and am dizzy because I stopped breathing. There was no thinking involved and I love when I can escape to that place in music. My biggest hope for this record is that whoever is listening can escape to that same place. Just keep breathing!"

***Truth And Lies* is out now on Spinefarm Records**

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers…

ALFIE TEMPLEMAN
Stop Thinking (About Me)
16-year-old indie prodigy Alfie Templeman recently released his EP *Sunday Morning Cereal* and played every instrument. Guitar grooves and singable melodies abound.

PIXIES
Catfish Kate
Pixies are back with a new album, *Beneath The Eyrie* – and this single features cool raked and arpeggiated guitars and classic Black Francis acoustics.

THE SHEEPDOGS
I've Got A Hole Where My Heart Should Be
Canadian blues-rockers The Sheepdogs are powered by the fretwork of Jimmy Bowskill. New LP *Changing Colours* proves Southern rock will never go out of style.

MODERN NATURE
Footsteps
The brainchild of former Ultimate Painting member Jack Cooper, *Footsteps* features a repetitive, two-note inversion with droning strings and sumptuous sax licks.

FRANKIE COSMOS
Windows
The first single from the New York band's fourth album, *Windows* has a spontaneous and laid-back mood, with guitar parts that were written and recorded on the spot.

YONAKA
You Need To Calm Down – Recorded At Abbey Road
Recently in session for Spotify's regular *Singles* series, this cover shows off Taylor Swift's stadium-ready *You Need To Calm Down* via sharp, distorted guitars.

SLIPKNOT
Unsainted
With its sweet choir sawn in half by Corey Taylor's opening vocal, *Duality*-esque drums lead into brutal riffery that could pierce straight through a bulletproof vest.

TEMPLES
You're Either On Something
James Bagshaw and co return with a third LP that's reminiscent of Tame Impala eating a Cornetto in the sunshine. Octave guitars underpin the 1960s inspiration.

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Over the last decade or so, the fuzz pedal has undergone a resurgence in the guitar world, thanks in part to the angular, memorable and often monolithic riffs of stars such as Jack White, Dan Auerbach and St. Vincent.

This upturn in interest has reignited the fuzz-pedal market, with offerings ranging from zippy, velcro-like lo-fi scuzz to boutique stompboxes with wristwatch precision and fully featured fuzz machines pushing the possibilities of the effect.

Keeley's new Fuzz Bender – which is a germanium-and-silicon hybrid – aims to sit neatly between both ends of the spectrum, offering boutique build quality alongside a vast range of fuzz voices, from vintage-style sounds to spitty, voltage-starved tones and sharp sawtooth disarray.

Described as a 'five-knob, three-transistor modern fuzz for the masses', the Fuzz Bender sports a three-band EQ with an additional bias control. The powerful active EQ circuit showcases just how versatile fuzz pedals can be: full of highly usable, no-compromise tones which retain the character of the pedal throughout.

To enter, head to guitar.com/news/competitions/fuzz-bender, answer the question below and fill out the form...

In what year was Keeley Electronics founded?
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HOW TO BUY A VINTAGE GUITAR

While most of us lust after battered old instruments, dropping a hefty amount of cash on a guitar is a scary prospect if you don't know what you're doing. And that's where we're here to help. Over the following pages, we've assembled a global panel of experts – from dealers and collectors to repairers and rock stars – to offer you the benefit of their hard-earned wisdom and help you to take the plunge into the wonderful world of vintage-guitar ownership…

MEET OUR EXPERTS

MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

Formerly the co-owner of Seattle vintage guitar repair and restoration specialists Mike & Mike's Guitar Bar, Mike now lives in Long Beach, CA, playing guitar with the likes of VAVÁ, Kali Kazoo, and Fellow Robot, as well as regularly contributing to *Guitar Magazine* and *Fretboard Journal*. He knows more about old Jazzmasters and the guitars of Rivers Cuomo than anyone else we know.

KRIS BLAKELY

The man better known as Fried Okra on Instagram and the Les Paul Forum, Mississippi native Kris has assembled one of the coolest guitar collections ever featured in this publication. His inventory includes everything from 50s Strats and Teles to 1930s Gibson acoustics, as well as a 1959 Les Paul previously owned by Paul Kossoff.

JOE BONAMASSA

A man who surely needs no introduction. Joe is not only one of the most popular and respected guitar players in the world today, but also one of the most prolific collectors of vintage gear – and a man who has owned and played more 1959 Les Pauls than practically anyone else on the planet.

JAMES GAY

James is the guitars manager at Well Played Gear, Singapore's experts in used and vintage guitar gear. Prior to joining WPG, James worked for legendary Nashville guitar repairer Joe Glaser, where he serviced, repaired and restored guitars for some of the most legendary artists in the business.

ED OLESZKO

Guitar Magazine contributor and vintage guitar obsessive Ed is probably the only person you'll ever meet who takes 1950s Gibson Les Pauls and a 1951 Fender V-Front Super out for a function band gig. Ed's also one half of the 'Tone Twins' YouTube channel, where Ed and *Guitar Magazine*'s own Huw Price get extremely nerdy about vintage guitars and amps.

DAN ORKIN

Dan Orkin is director of content at Reverb, the online marketplace for buying and selling new, used and vintage music gear. One of the first employees to join Reverb, Dan has helped the team produce thousands of articles, videos, and more. A go-to for sales trends and pricing data, Dan also edits the Reverb Price Guide.

JOHN SHULTS

The proprietor of True Vintage Guitar in Birmingham, Alabama, John Shults bought his first vintage guitar – a '72 Martin D-35 – back in 2009, and has been obsessed with them ever since. Since 2014, he's been driving all over the Southeastern United States searching for vintage guitars to buy and restore, documenting their stories and journeys on his popular Instagram account.

ABOVE Auctions can be a great opportunity to grab a vintage bargain; this pair of 1960s Fenders featured in a recent sale at Gardiner Houlgate (guitar-auctions.co.uk)

GUITARIST, KNOW THYSELF

James Gay, Well Played Gear

"Are you a player, or a collector? For a player, the biggest thing is that the instrument still functions. If it doesn't function properly, playability goes out the window. I'm talking specifically about things like the truss rod (if it has an adjustable one) working, if there are any obvious signs of damage to hardware or structure, does it have fret issues that need to be addressed, etc. It's important to make sure the 'bones' of the instrument, so to speak, are still good.

"For a collector, the priorities shift a little bit. Their chief focus mainly becomes that things haven't been modified, regardless of playability. Signs like if it's been refretted, if the electronics have been changed or replaced, if the hardware has been swapped out. Has the finish been touched up on certain areas, hiding a repair (ie a headstock break), things like that all affect the potential value of the guitar."

LOVE IS THE KEY

John Shults, True Vintage Guitar

"Buy what you love. A lot of buyers get hung up on which guitars or amps have better investment potential and lose sight of the reason they are looking at guitars in the first place. You'll always be best informed on the guitars and gear that you love. Allow yourself to get side-tracked on whatever gear is occupying your headspace. You can't really predict the future value of anything, so you might as well have what you love!

"If profit or investment potential is your sole reason for buying vintage, then you will likely have a bad experience. Profit and investment potential are sometimes a bonus when owning vintage, but they're not the reason vintage gear is fun."

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Ed Oleszko

"Do your research, knowledge is power. Read, read and read some more… research pictures and video. Get to know the minute details of the guitar model you're thinking of buying, down to the last screw and assess its current condition and originality compared to a 100 per cent stock model.

"If you can't physically check out the guitar in person, then ask for lots photos of every detail (inside and out, including under 'black light'). I'd also ask for video and sound. If you are well-read, armed with research and knowledge you are in a stronger position to assess the guitar's condition, quality and originality and ultimately, therefore, its fair value."

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS

Dan Orkin, Reverb.com

"If you see a listing that indicates some sort of damage either in the description or photos, don't hold back from asking more questions and getting specific. When buying vintage online, it's really important that buyers feel empowered to communicate with sellers to address any questions or concerns, whether you're buying from a pro shop or an individual.

"When using Reverb, for instance, it's really easy to initiate a conversation with the seller on any listing on the site. If you have any concerns or need more details, it's way better to communicate that up front. Plus, most people who sell vintage guitars online are really passionate about it, so usually will share some of that passion for the instrument with you as part of the process."

REMEMBER WHAT IT'S FOR

Michael James Adams

"The most common pitfall I see among vintage-guitar buyers is the tendency to treat old instruments like religious artifacts or priceless relics. True, vintage guitars can be thrilling to hold and play and some do have an innate sense of history that's compelling. But at the end of the day, they're still just wood and wire, so it's important to temper your expectations.

"For instance, I see so many folks write off guitars that aren't 100 per cent original, but unless your goal is to collect and maintain an absolutely pristine

collection, changed tuners, modern potentiometers, and even a fresh coat of paint shouldn't dissuade players from picking up the guitar of their dreams. Those things can also bring huge savings, so keep an open mind and understand that guitars are meant to be played and anything that comes into contact with human beings is bound to have a few issues."

BRING A PROFESSIONAL

James Gay, Well Played Gear

"I always recommend spending some time with the instruments in person before committing to a purchase. If you don't know how to do things like adjust a truss rod, or give an instrument a basic setup, asking to have the guitar inspected by your luthier/guitar tech would be a great idea, just so they can make sure everything is structurally sound."

BEAUTY CAN BE SKIN DEEP

Michael James Adams

"One thing to be aware of with refinished guitars is that sometimes the new finish may be hiding modification scars, but if you hold the body in the light at the right angle, a good reflection can often highlight the otherwise undetectable lines of filled-in routs. And if you're not sure whether or not a guitar is refinished, make sure you're familiar with the available colours of the era as well as what those shades actually looked like at the time.

"For instance, there's a lot of argument about what constitutes a proper Fiesta Red, but there's definitely some variation in the paints used, as well as how an aged clear coat can change the hue."

EVEN 'ICONIC' GUITARS WILL NEED SOME TLC

James Gay, Well Played Gear

"I've seen a lot of people focus so much on a specific year or range of years. For example, everyone knows that a pre-war Martin is like the Holy Grail of dreadnought acoustics. But that doesn't necessarily mean all of them are going to be great right away. Decades-old instruments often end up having all sorts of hidden issues, either due to string tension and its effects over a generation, or even due to haphazard luthier experiments gone wrong.

"Sometimes, even a guitar that appears restored from the outside could end up needing a good workover by someone with a real eye for vintage instrument restoration before it truly sings the way it's meant to."

BELOW Vintage-guitar collectors love a little candy in their case. This '63 Esquire from ATB Guitars (atbguitars.com) came complete with a period-correct instruction manual

ABOVE Vintage combinations don't come much more classic than a P-90 Gibson and a roaring Marshall amp

TODAY'S TRASH MIGHT BE TOMORROW'S TREASURE
Kris Blakely

"I'm funny about telling someone to shy away from a particular vintage instrument, because what's not hot today, might be the hottest vintage guitar on the market tomorrow. Also, it depends on what you may like and your bank account. If you were just hankering for a vintage guitar, but your finances are limited, then think about a well-worn vintage guitar. Those are cool and usually more available at reasonable prices."

BE CAREFUL WITH BUDGET BRANDS
Dan Orkin, Reverb.com

"I would be careful with older, lower-end archtops from budget brands. They look great and some of them are fantastic guitars, but if buying online especially, it can be difficult to assess how playable they are ahead of time as they are prone to damage over time.

"That said, there are often great buys to be found in the lesser-known models or eras from key brands. Also buying the category of guitar that a brand isn't super well-known for can yield some great value. For instance, people think of Guild electrics a lot less than their acoustics, but some of the 60s and 70s Guild electrics are really excellent buys."

TRUST YOUR GUT
Kris Blakely

"I see and hear of this happening all too often. You find the one, it has a story that really intrigues you, like the old, 'It was my grandfather's guitar' thing. Yeah, it could be, but where is the provenance? If something in your gut tells you something is amiss, I find it best to sleep on it – and it's so important to not be afraid to ask questions."

IT'S A GOOD TIME TO GET ONBOARD...
John Shults, True Vintage Guitar

"After the peak in 2008, the vintage market appears to be steady and growing at a reasonable pace. This is best for both buyers and sellers, because it makes the market safer to participate in.

"Vintage instruments have been historically an excellent investment, but that shouldn't be the sole reason to participate.

"Your motivation to participate should reside in your love and passion for music and the gear that made it possible." G

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JOE BONAMASSA
FOR THE LOVE OF A GUITAR

If you want to know something about buying vintage guitars, there are few better people to ask than Joe Bonamassa… so that's exactly what we did. Writing exclusively for *Guitar Magazine*, Joe gives us his top tips for buying vintage…

WORDS JOE BONAMASSA **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

Hey guys, I've been asked to write a few words about collecting guitars and to offer a little advice about my process of collecting them, and so here are five points that will help you in that endeavour:

1 ORIGINALITY AND HISTORY

When purchasing from original owners, you should understand that you are buying a story as well as a guitar. Each guitar has its own incredible history and provenance which may include photos of the original owners from back in the day, manufacturer and dealer tags, as well as its own musical legacy. Likewise, you will often encounter an unfortunate lineage of undisclosed issues, repairs and disgruntled former owners that feel cursed by their ownership of that particular instrument.

You want to seek out the former and avoid the latter. One of the first questions I ask myself is, "Does this guitar's originality add up as total package and is it proportionally aged from the case down to the string saddles?" and "Does it have a history I want to embrace?"

2 DON'T GET INTO IT TO MAKE MONEY

Guitars can be great investments over time, but they shouldn't be treated as 401ks, stocks or commodities. I have a joke that goes: "What do you call a guitar collector who just sold one of his guitars for a dollar more than he bought it for?" Answer: "A guitar dealer." If your primary motivations for collecting guitars are a quick flip and fast money, it can get one into dangerous territory where you will expose yourself to the best *and* the worst elements of the business. For many folks, the profit becomes more important than refining a collection that you truly enjoy and love.

3 BUY WHAT YOU LIKE

I love solidbody guitars made by Fender and Gibson from the years 1950 to 1965. That's what I collect, seek out and cherish. It is good to diversify a little bit, but never let other people spend your money for you. I get asked all the time: "Joe, when are you gonna get into this brand or that model?" I always tell them that collecting is a highly personal thing and at the end of the day, you alone have to be happy with what you purchase. Don't be concerned about 'keeping up with the Joneses'.

4 KEEP IT FUN

The minute a deal gets confrontational, or someone is shouting at me or insinuating they know more than me (which they probably do) or making the negotiation an unpleasant experience, it takes all the fun out of buying that instrument. The seller usually dictates the terms of sale, so periodically, I get some strange requests. On occasion, I have been asked to bring a bag of cash and meet in a Del Taco parking lot (or something similar) in the middle of the night.

When sellers make it too difficult, I'm out. This is supposed to be fun and the minute you own the guitar after a deal like that, you begin to resent it and feel the whole thing was done under duress. It's a killjoy. It's honestly better to just walk away. If there is one thing I know about this collecting thing, it's there is always going to be another deal and more stuff to buy.

5 DON'T BE A LAZY COLLECTOR

The best thing is for every collector to do their homework. By that I mean, be a shrewd buyer, know the instruments your buying inside and out. Know the right people to buy from and try to avoid the ones who are not trustworthy. Know more than you need to, because you will see anomalies and things that are not in the books or on the internet. Have a trusted circle of knowledgeable friends you can check with before you make a purchase.

Be confident so as to not buy into myths and hearsay and false information that has been disseminated through the internet forums and elsewhere.

Experience, knowledge and the advice of other learned collectors will help to make wise choices and to know an original guitar when you see one. All of this takes patience, work and dedication. If you follow my advice, you'll build a collection of instruments you will be proud of and enjoy. Play well, be safe, play loud and have fun!

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1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster
1956 Gibson ES-5N Switchmaster Blonde
1959 Gibson ES-355 Mono Stoptail
1960 Gibson ES-345 TDSV Cherry PAF's
1962 Gibson ES-335 TD PAF PAT
1964 Gibson ES-345 TDVC
1956 Gibson ES-175D
1959 Gibson ES-175D Players
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

1934 Gibson Super 400

1957 Fender Stratocaster Mary Kaye
1959 Fender Stratocaster maple neck
1961 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1962 Fender Stratocaster Fiesta Red
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White
1969 Fender Stratocaster S/B
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB
1982 Fender Stratocaster AVRI

1952 Fender Telecaster ex-Lenny Kravitz
1953 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster
1958 Fender Telecaster Custom Prototype CATALOGUE guitar!
1967 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline
1969 Fender Telecaster Sonic Blue

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1952 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1955 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1968 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1955 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1960 Gibson Les Paul TV Junior
1956 Gibson Les Paul TV Special
1962 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Ebony Block
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

1966 Fender Jazz Bass Sonic Blue MINT
1953 Fender Precision Bass
1980 Musicman Bass MINT!

1963 Gretsch Tennessean
1972 Dick Knight Custom Twin Neck ex Jon Camp Renaissance
1967 Rickenbacker 360/12 Gold Parts

1964 Epiphone FT110 Frontier
1968 Martin 00-18C

2005 PRS Employees Model Santana 2
2016 PRS DGT Private Stock
2015 Gibson True Historic Ace Frehley
2016 Gibson True Historic R9 Tom Murphy

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1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

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1956 Gibson Les Paul Standard MINT

1969 Gibson Flying V

1964 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White

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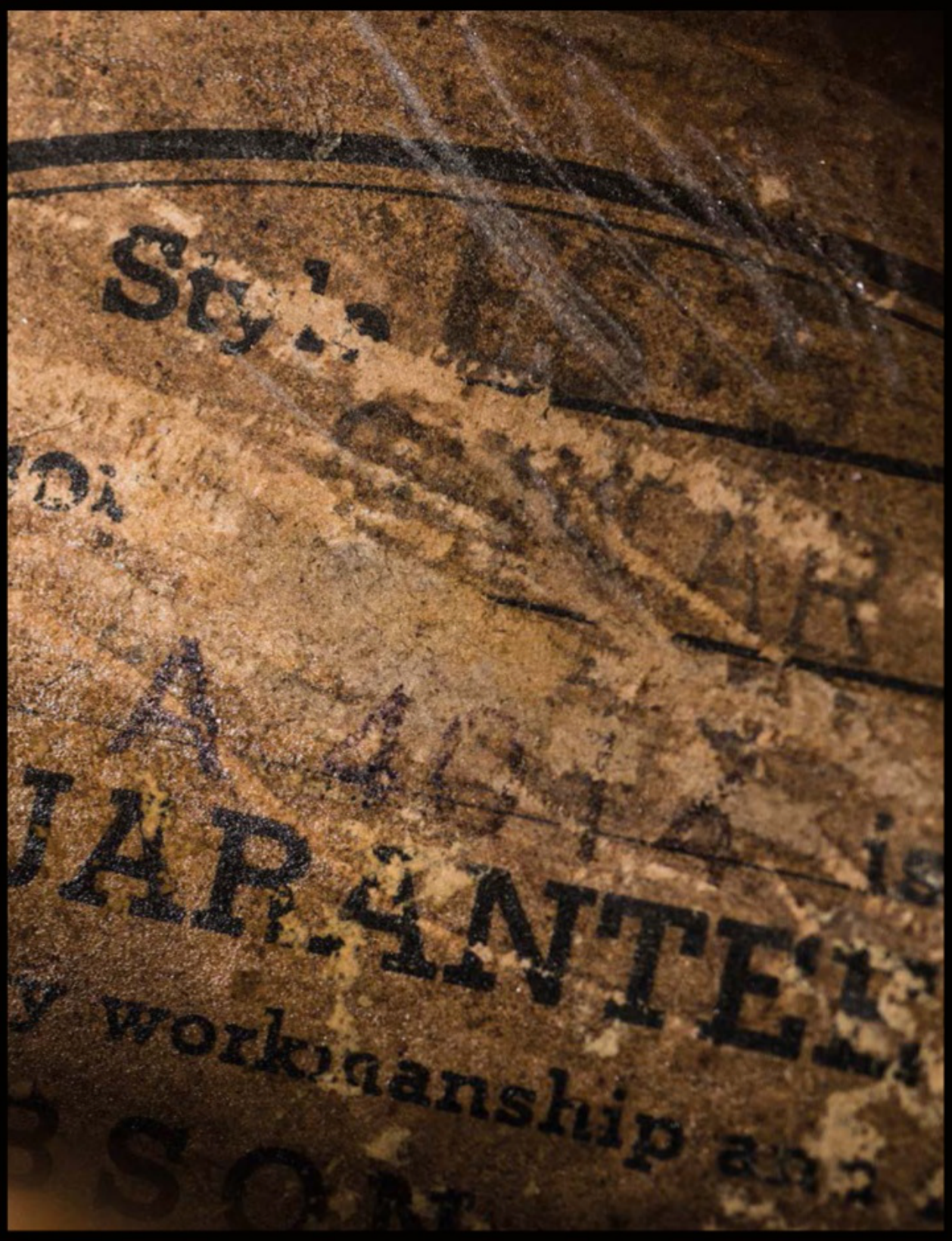
THE MONEY SHOT
T-BONE WALKER'S 1949 GIBSON ES-5

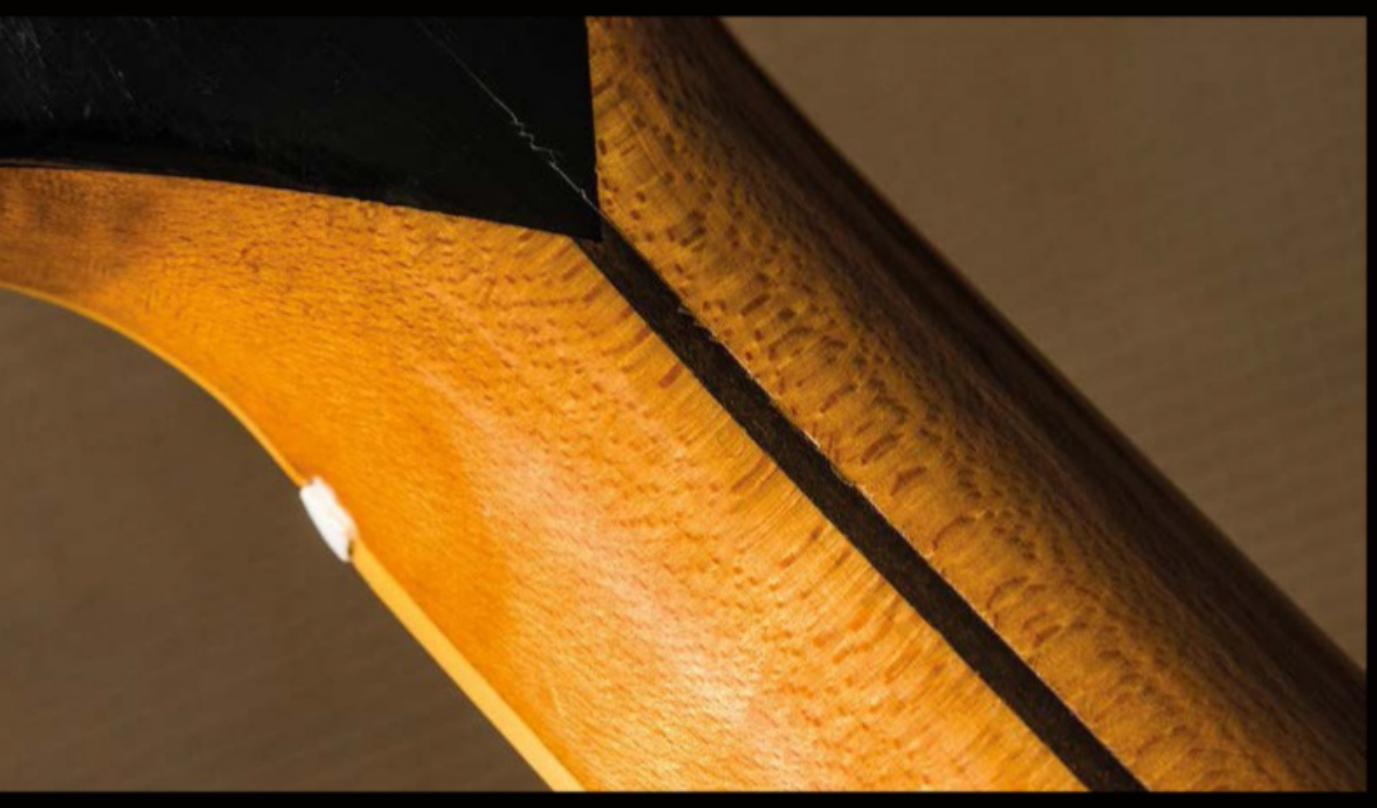


A 1949 Gibson ES-5 with a breathtaking flametop would be more than worthy of inclusion in these pages, but this month's coverstar is truly unique, having once been the main squeeze of none other than T-Bone Walker. A giant of electric blues guitar, Walker's trailblazing playing style and trademark showmanship cast a long shadow, influencing BB King, Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix and countless others along the way.

Believed to have been stolen from Walker at a jazz festival in France in the late 1960s, this instrument subsequently passed through the hands of several owners who were oblivious to its historical significance. Now residing at Matt's Guitar Shop in Paris, its battle scars and repairs are consistent with Walker's onstage flamboyance, while archive photographs bear witness to the area around the jack socket being a frequent casualty of his exuberance. If only guitars could talk, this would have a tale or two to tell… G

Visit mattsguitar.shop for more information

Fender



IN WITH THE OLD?

Are the superior sonics commonly attributed to vintage electric guitars a happy consequence of the ageing process, or did golden-era instruments always sound that way?

WORDS HUW PRICE

The secret of vintage tone is old wood, right? It's certainly a belief prevalent in vintage-guitar circles and there are thriving businesses predicated on that hypothesis. But must you have vintage wood and, by extension, vintage guitars to achieve authentic vintage tone? And secondly, do electric guitars improve with age?

Let's begin with Les Paul 'conversions' as a case study. For the uninitiated, this is an increasingly popular practice than involves taking a 'lesser' 1950s – or sometimes late 1960s – Les Paul and using it as a donor guitar to convert to 1958-'60 Les Paul Standard, aka Burst, specifications.

Les Paul conversions are particularly interesting, because they're a unique instance of major structural alterations and total refinishes being deemed acceptable to tone hounds. In effect, they test the 'old wood' hypothesis to destruction… sometimes literally.

Owning a real Burst is sheer fantasy for most of us, but a mid-50s Goldtop is a couple of PAFs and maybe a bridge away from being essentially the same guitar. Countless Goldtops have been converted into faux Bursts in recent times and it certainly makes sense financially, but can the same be said from a playing perspective?

I recently tested this out with a friend's '53/'59 conversion loaded with vintage hardware and a set of modern PAF replica pickups. The converted instrument sounded a little flat and nowhere near as good as his Gibson Custom Collector's Choice LP, also loaded with a vintage hardware but additionally, a set of genuine vintage PAFs.

Unplugged, it was a different story – the conversion had a richer resonance and noticeably longer sustain. But as much as I appreciate the unplugged tone of a fine Les Paul, I think most guitarists will agree they sound better plugged in.

We transferred the PAFs to the conversion and it came to life. It also sounded better than the Collector's Choice model when fitted with the same pickups, because the PAFs allowed its superior acoustic qualities to come through. This establishes two things. The wood itself cannot be disregarded entirely, but a recently manufactured Burst repro with a set of original PAFs and hardware can sound better than a genuine 1950s Les Paul with reproduction pickups.

I've conducted similar tests using a couple of original '54 Goldtops and a Greco Goldtop conversion loaded with a set of 1953 P-90s and a 1950s wrapover bridge. I've even compared a Fender Custom Shop Stratocaster with a vintage bridge and a fully loaded vintage pickguard against an original '63 Strat and installed genuine PAFs in a 1981 Greco.

Consistent results lead to clear conclusions. Providing the wood is of the correct type and of a similar weight, newer electric guitars equipped with vintage pickups and hardware can often sound almost indistinguishable from all-original vintage models. They can also sound superior to vintage guitars that have lost their original pickups and hardware.

ABOVE This modified 1952 Goldtop has looks to die for – but has the passing of time actually enhanced its tone in any discernible way?

AGE CONCERNS

On rare occasions, we encounter vintage guitars that are undeniably mind-blowing. It might seem plausible to attribute such great tone to the seasoning effects of age, but could that be a naïve and lazy assumption?

During our recent conversation, vintage-obsessed YouTube stars Doug and Pat (featured on p40 of this issue) made this telling point: "We might subscribe to the tonal differences being down to the quality of the wood, but not the age of the wood." It's a fine but crucial distinction.

There are obvious differences between lightweight 'swamp' ash and heavy northern 'baseball bat' ash, but nobody talks about the specific Louisiana bayou

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from which Fender's timber suppliers sourced their lumber back in the 1950s. Even less attention is given to alder and when tonewoods are discussed in relation to Fenders, weight is considered to be more important than age.

Lightweight ash and alder body blanks are still widely available, so vintage Fender enthusiasts tend to focus their attention on pickups and, to a lesser extent, hardware. This strikes me as sensible, so long as opinions remain unswayed by marketing blurbs that reference Texas.

While the informed vintage Gretsch enthusiast may draw some distinction between three- and five-ply bodies, and various bracing methods, nobody has ever claimed there's such a thing as 'tone ply'. Fortunately, vintage Gretsch pickups remain relatively affordable and some of the Custom Shop guitars being produced under Stephen Stern's guidance are right up there with – some might even say superior to – anything Gretsch has ever produced.

In the electric guitar world, the vintage wood cult centres primarily on Gibson more than any other manufacturer. In fact, it's almost exclusive to solidbodies of the 1950s rather than semis or 1960s solidbodies. Some of the wood Gibson was using during the 50s has become almost unattainable and, as a result, fetishised.

Again, the focus is specific. Maple, if considered at all, is revered mostly for its appearance. Brazilian rosewood fingerboards have been off the menu since the 1960s, but any piece of wood that has been wrapped in plastic, glued onto a steel-reinforced substrate and had 22 pieces of metal hammered into it surely can't exert that much tonal influence. When it comes to Les Pauls, it's all about the mahogany.

THIS SPREAD This 1959 Burst belonged to guitarist and vintage collector Cosmo, who believes that wood is a key component in deciding the character of Burst tone

MARVELLOUS MAHOGANY

Not all mahogany is created equal – and it seems that Gibson used various types. We have observed Burst weights from eight to 10lbs, and Les Paul aficionado Cosmo Verrico is among those who has noted that the colour varies. He associates the best tonal qualities with mahogany that has a specific 'earthy red' appearance.

He also suggests: "Sometimes, the colour looks more gold and those don't sound as good. The earlier P-90 Goldtops tend to have the gold-colour mahogany and even if you stick a couple of PAFs on them, they still don't come up to it." If that's true, then it's *caveat emptor* when it comes to Burst conversions.

Much of the 'mahogany' used in modern guitars comes from Africa, and some don't regard it as 'true' or 'genuine' mahogany. During the 1950s, Gibson used mahogany that could have been Cuban, Honduran or Brazilian – varieties that tend to be softer and lighter.

It has been suggested that Gibson's mahogany was 'old growth' and was dried out slowly over decades rather than dried in a kiln. Given the timber quantities that Gibson must have been using, that seems implausible, but a lack of consensus suggests that nobody knows for sure. Perhaps the main beneficiaries of this pseudo-science, mythologising and magical thinking are those who have invested significant sums in vintage Gibsons.

It's often suggested that old wood dries out, but the seasoning and drying processes are designed to reduce water content, not eliminate it. Wood tends to reach an equilibrium with its surrounding environment by continually absorbing and releasing moisture.

Although it may be possible to debunk the 'dried out' theory, it has been shown that other changes do occur within wood over time. Cut timber contains pitches, sugars and oils that eventually oxidise, evaporate and mineralise. Lignin binds the fibres and it eventually hardens like glue. The upshot is that timber gradually becomes lighter, stiffer and quicker to respond – all of which is good for tone.

Under normal circumstances, this process would take decades in a chunky electric-guitar body and it may be inhibited by the finish. Assuming those bodies are still ageing, vintage guitars should still

be sounding better with each passing year. Despite owning a few vintage instruments myself, I can't honestly say I've noticed that.

These structural changes are interesting nonetheless and the process can be accelerated by baking the wood in an oxygen-free environment – a process known as torrefaction. I've played acoustics and electrics made with roasted timber and the results can be extremely impressive. Roasted maple has become commonplace, and we're starting to see roasted pine and mahogany, too.

If you don't have the money for a vintage guitar – or the patience to wait half a century for your guitar to apparently start sounding good – the obvious solution is to buy an instrument made from reclaimed timber. Several noted guitar makers have been doing this for a while.

For example, Dennis Fano's Novo brand builds remarkable electric guitars from tempered and reclaimed timber – and we have never encountered structurally similar guitars that can boast more natural resonance.

I've also played some recent ultra-high-end Les Paul replicas made from very old wood that already sound like they're decades old.

FINAL CUT

If they suit your style, there's some basis for suggesting that 1950s and early 60s electric guitars remain largely unsurpassed. I'd suggest this is a combination of comfortable weight, sublime neck profiles, superior hardware and pickups that have never been bettered. The thrill of playing a rock 'n' roll artefact cannot be dismissed either.

I'd accept that correct wood of the appropriate weight is important, too, but it's not the most crucial factor. The notion that electric-guitar tone improves with age is entirely different and I'm unconvinced it stacks up. When you listen to great guitar tones on landmark recordings, remember those guitars were barely second-hand at the time of recording, let alone vintage. Believing in the maturation theory means accepting that all those Gibsons and Fenders from the 1970s eventually started to sound incredible. Spoiler alert… they didn't.

More tellingly, if all those pre-1965 guitars have continued to improve, like fine wine or single-malt whiskies, then modern players who still tour and record with them should sound noticeably better than their heroes did back in the day. Would anyone seriously suggest they do?

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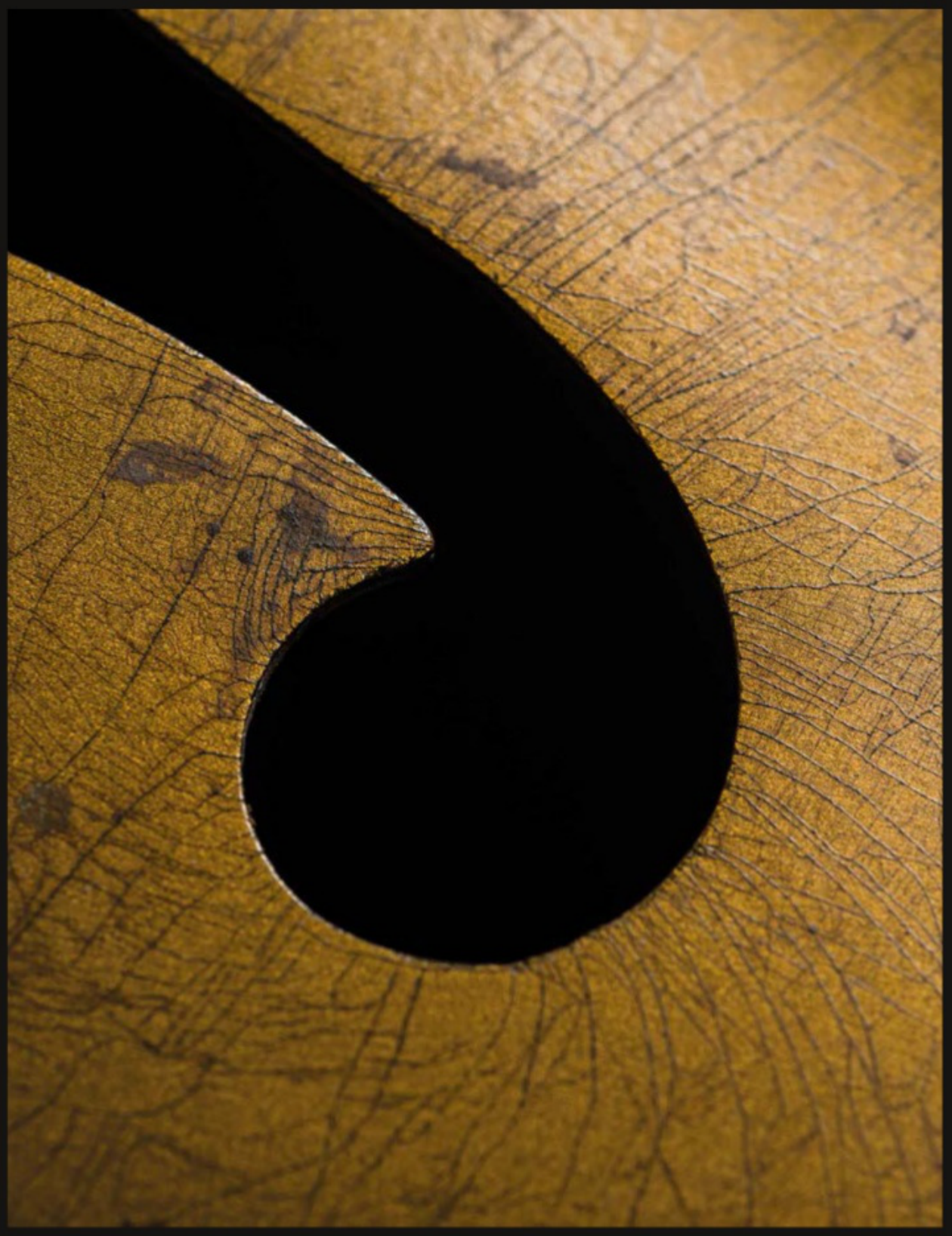
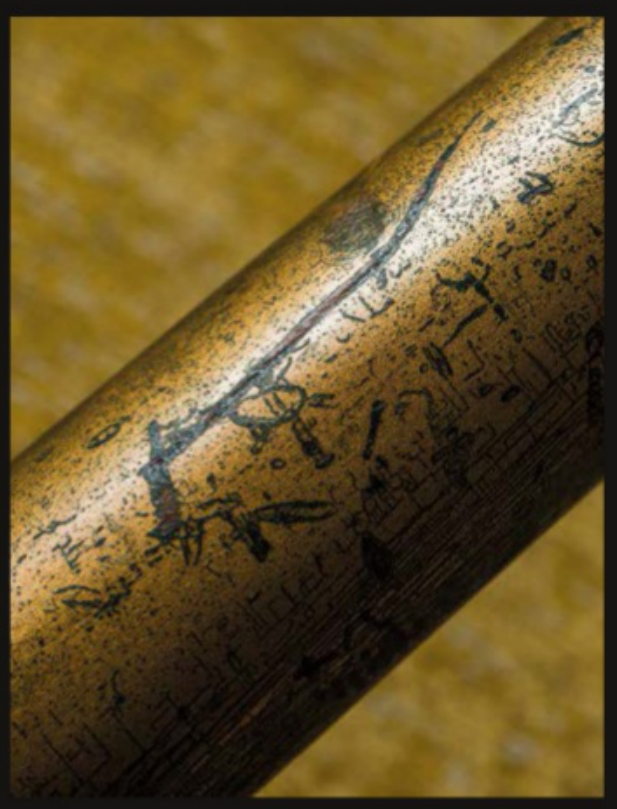
THE MONEY SHOT
1950S KAY ARCHTOP





The Kay Musical Instrument Company was established in Chicago in 1931 by Henry Kay Kuhrmeyer. It offered its first electric guitar in 1936 – the same year as Gibson's ES-150 – although Kuhrmeyer's Stromberg-Voisinet brand was responsible for arguably the world's first commercially available electric Spanish guitar, the Stromberg Electro, back in 1928.

Kay manufactured many instruments with its own branding, along with guitars for other brands and major department stores. This rare 1950s archtop was once owned by Alex Trimble from indie-rockers Two Door Cinema Club and, after being sold via the band's Reverb store, made its way to Matt's Guitar Shop in Paris, where it's currently available for €1,299.

It's a hugely vibey instrument with a chunky neck and a woody old-school archtop tone. Like many a '50s Goldtop or ES-295, the bronze particles suspended in the paint have oxidised and the resulting verdigris has given this Kay a striking patina. G

Visit mattsguitar.shop for more information

TALKING PICTURES

Following an extensive overhaul, Guitar Center's Hollywood location may have a new look, but what really matters hasn't changed a bit. We check out some jewels from the vintage room…

WORDS MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Hollywood has its fair share of iconic destinations, from the world-famous Grauman's Chinese Theater to the star-studded Walk Of Fame – and just about everywhere you turn, there's a familiar filming location conjuring memories of cinematic thrills from days gone by. Musicians in particular will note Amoeba Records, the Rainbow Bar & Grill where Lemmy himself was a fixture, and the Hollywood Bowl, where this author witnessed Tom Petty's second-to-last-ever performance prior to his shocking death just one week later.

Guitar fanatics on the prowl for memorable locations would be wise to add Guitar Center Hollywood to the list. Built into a former movie theater on Sunset Boulevard (where, rumour has it, the first 'talkie' picture was shown), GC Hollywood is more than just a big-box store, it's a love letter to the heyday of rock 'n' roll.

Before you've even reached the entrance, you're accosted by a larger-than-life mural of a mid-solo Jimi Hendrix and to make it through the front door, you'll first have to navigate the Rock Walk where a host of rock 'n' roll idols have left behind handprints and index-finger signatures in the concrete beneath your feet. Glass cases line the entryway containing an ever-rotating cadre of gear from such luminaries as Slash, St Vincent, Zakk Wylde and Eric Clapton, to name a few.

Inside, GC Hollywood has just undergone a multi-million dollar renovation with expanded retail areas for accessories and drums, as well as much larger main floor space for guitars and amps. Gone are the tiny side rooms where used gear once lived, replaced by a much more open and inviting place to trot out your favourite Metallica riffs.

A wall-sized bank of effects pedals gives customers the chance to try out a few favourites (or turn them all on) and the opposite side of the room is populated with a vast array of new and pre-owned instruments just begging to be played.

As you make your way toward the back of the store, a choice presents itself: you can either go up the stairs to grab that much-needed set of strings, or go down to the acoustic department where the fanciest of flat-tops reside. Descend and pass through another set of glass doors to find an immaculate collection of vintage gear, which for many of us is the perfect excuse for a quick trip.

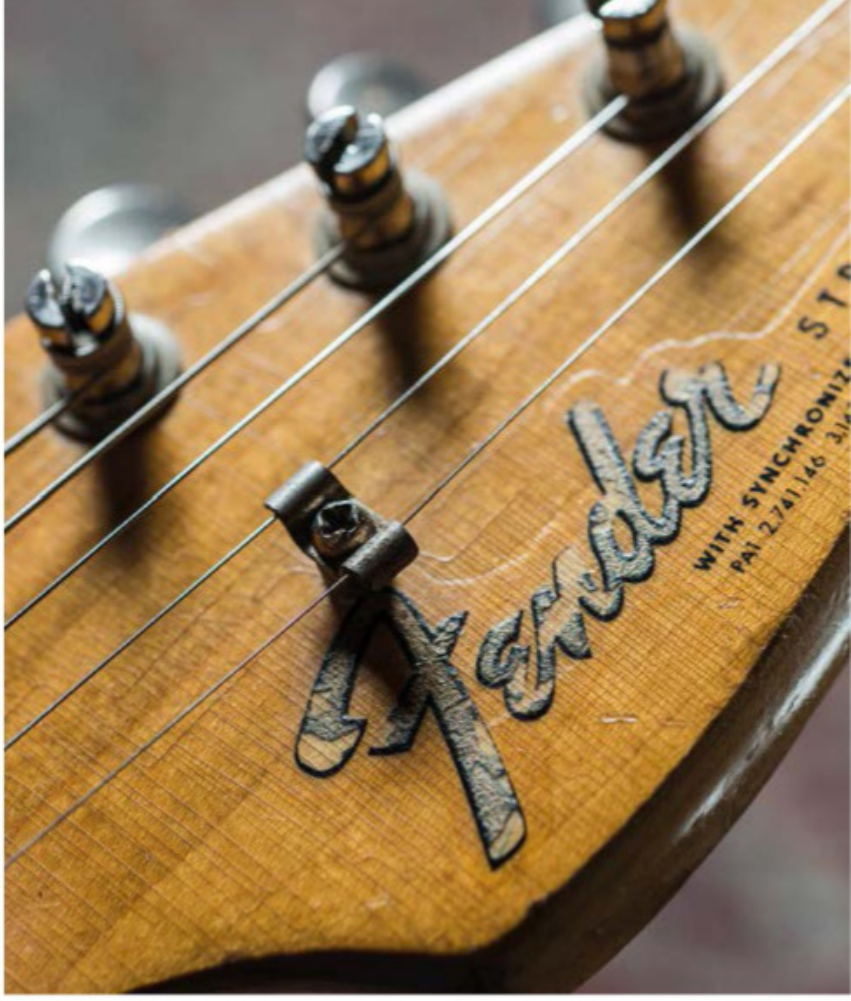
GC first opened in 1959 as The Organ Center, and then later The Vox Center (a change spurred on by The Beatles' popularity in the States) and has been a fixture of the musical landscape of LA ever since. The store has always addressed changing trends in music by offering a wide selection of not just guitar gear, but also drums, synthesisers and recording equipment. As the vintage-guitar market came into its own in the 1990s, Guitar Center created a dedicated vintage-gear department.

If there's a rare and exciting vintage guitar hanging on the walls, it's thanks to Guitar Center's team of vintage experts. With nearly 300 GC stores around the country, this team is constantly evaluating instruments, poring over photographs and verifying originality to ensure that every acquisition is the right fit for GC's legendary stable of amazing pieces.

At this sunrise hour on Sunset Boulevard, Nick Conte, vintage sales and inventory manager, takes us through a number of interesting examples from this extensive collection – all for sale – along with the help of artist relations manager Eric Bradley.

OPPOSITE A very rare two-pickup 1959 Les Paul Custom with Bigsby

ABOVE Guitar Center Hollywood has recently received a major overhaul



THIS PAGE Your eyes do not deceive you – that is indeed a bank of Jaguar controls, installed to provide a range of pickup-selection options

1962 FENDER STRATOCASTER 'METROPOLITAN MUSIC MOD'

This 1962 Stratocaster immediately captivated us with its very unusual mod: a bank of Jaguar switches for individual pickup selection. When questioned, Nick filled us in on the story behind the mod: "This came from Wisconsin, but those switches, we'd never seen anything like it. A little while later, John Shults from True Vintage Guitar came across another Strat with the same mod and reached out. He did some research and it turns out that a shop in Milwaukee called Metropolitan Music made a few of these back then for a particular player who liked the setup."

According to the True Vintage Guitar blog (truevintageguitar.com), both guitars have identical wiring, with the same green enamel-coated wire, so it seems that a single tech is responsible. With the ability to select neck and bridge or all-on pickup combinations, it's exactly the kind of mod that some players would find very useful. Discounting the mod, a replaced tone knob and a factory refinish in Lake Placid Blue done in '64, the guitar is otherwise intact. The chocolatey Brazilian rosewood fretboard shows pitting from vigorous play and for such an old refin, the body sure has held up quite well over the years.

1964-65 GIBSON FIREBIRD REVERSE

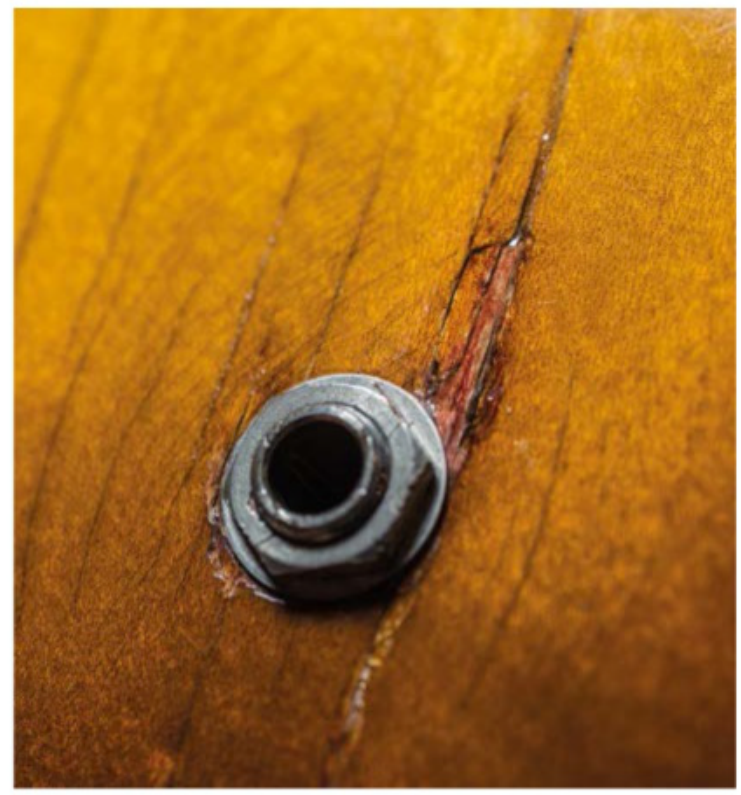
From the time of its introduction in 1963, sales of the Firebird weren't quite what Gibson had hoped. As the company was moving from the reverse (longer lower horn) to non-reverse (longer upper horn) body styles in the mid 1960s in an attempt to bolster customer interest, there were a few guitars that made it out of the factory sporting features from both models – exceedingly rare birds.

Transitional details include black P-90 pickups instead of the usual Firebird humbuckers found on the reverse body. The plank headstock boasts six-in-line Kluson tuners where one would normally find banjo tuners, the source of many a broken headstock due to their tendency to rest on the back of the case; thankfully, the headstock on this one remains intact.

Like later models, the fretboard is unbound with pearloid dot inlays. Rounding out the package is a short-frame vibrola with the 'teaspoon' arm, which allows for adjustable arm length via three mounting holes.

You may have noticed the gouges in the guitar top; while Nick is sure there's a story there, he admits that he doesn't know it.

THIS PAGE This rare Firebird from the transitional mid-60s period has features typical of both reverse and non-reverse models



THIS PAGE Up close, the wear patterns on the components and finish of this sumptuous 1958 ES-335 offer plenty of clues about how it was played

"You can tell it's a screwdriver, someone definitely did that. When we bought it, there was tape covering it, which we removed because we want people to know what's going on."

1958 GIBSON ES-335

How could we walk by this lovely sunburst ES-335 without acknowledging its greatness? Nick tells us it's a '58 model with its original PAF pickups and hardware and those in-the-know should immediately recognise the 'long pickguard' as well, a feature phased out during the '60 and '61 model years.

Up close, the wear on this guitar evokes a storied past; the neck pickup ring shows signs of vigorous strumming, ground down between the strings. The nickel hardware has oxidised and divots near the heel of the neck describe fingernails left too long, or at the very least, more strum-pattern incursions. The area around the output jack shows signs of a break, though now fully repaired and in stable condition. Leant up against a sweet little Maestro accordion amplifier, it's hard to imagine another pair so perfectly suited for one another.

Speaking of the body, let's have a pop quiz, shall we? Dear Reader, tell us: does this 335 exhibit 'Mickey Mouse ears'? If you haven't heard that term before, it refers to a very specific type of cutaway shape found only in a few years of production. Over the course of its lifespan, the 335 had a number of different 'ear' or 'horn' shapes, with the cartoon cutaways being highly prized.

The answer: it does not. This '58 comes from the pre-Mouse era. Mouse ears are more full and symmetrical at the cutaway than the slightly gently sloped ones we see here.

As we survey the carefully curated displays before us, guitars racked six high in some places, the feeling

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THIS PAGE This Sparkling Burgundy-finished ES-335 has the unusual TDSV model designation, meaning it incorporates a Stereo Varitone control

of being somewhat overwhelmed washes over us. After all, having to choose a scant few to feature from the dozens represented here is no easy task. After a brief moment, we zero in on our next victim – er, subject.

1968 GIBSON ES-335 TDSV

The cool factor of this unusual ES-335 cannot be overstated: Sparkling Burgundy was employed by Gibson as a way to cover up issues with the laminate tops used in the 335 series, but it also happens to look great. Thanks to years of UV exposure, this one has aged into a jaw-dropping metallic orange in areas, its clear coat appropriately yellowed and the red fading away.

The original hardware and plastic is all here, including the witch-hat knobs and Gibson logo pickguard, but the Grover tuners appear to have been added later. The model designation for this guitar is

ABOVE Mary Kaye owned this Telecaster and gigged it often; it was also modded with a second neck pickup and a switch to activate it

'TDSV' which stands for Thinline/Dual Cutaway/ Stereo Varitone. That's right, this 335 has an original Varitone wired in, standard equipment on the 345 and 355, but optional on the 335.

This one has the rare black surround denoting the notch filter positions and while many players seem to dislike this little tone circuit, it's actually quite useful as a secret weapon for fine-tuning the sound of the guitar.

MARY KAYE'S TELECASTER

The great Mary Kaye was a Las Vegas guitarist and vocalist credited with popularising the 'lounge' genre with The Mary Kaye Trio (formerly known as The Mary Ka'aihue Trio after her original surname).

In guitar circles, she is perhaps most enduringly famous for, however erroneously, her association with a certain blonde-and-gold Stratocaster which has become synonymous with the singer thanks to a one-off promotional photoshoot in 1956. She never actually owned the instrument, yet the name persisted.

Unlike that Strat with the gold hardware, this 1967 Telecaster is a proper Mary Kaye guitar. She performed regularly with this maple cap Tele, which bears some modifications favoured by Kaye herself, most notably the addition of a second neck pickup in the middle position. This pickup is engaged via a switch added to the treble-side horn, which works in tandem with the original three-way switch for a host of new pickup combinations. There's also an additional quarter-inch output jack on the control plate for bypassing the guitar's electronics.

Mary Kaye sold this guitar to the shop that maintained her guitars in Reno back in '93, signing the guard as she handed it off. On the front, her signature is largely worn away, but on the underside, Mary left a note for her favourite shop:

AJ Thank you
God bless you Peter
Love, Mary Kaye
6/10/93

1950 FENDER BROADCASTER

Eric Bradley grabs a rather haggard-looking guitar from its perch and places it on the inspection table, eager to show off their recent score: a 1950 Fender Broadcaster stripped and weathered like a barn door. "This one came from New Orleans, and the people

THIS PAGE A 1950 Broadcaster, with every original part present and correct (except for the stripped finish, of course)

we bought it from found it in the closet of the original owner," says Eric.

Though rough-hewn from the strip job, this guitar still has some original finish in the cavities and around the bridge. In a certain light, there's a bit of three-dimensional figuring in the wood which makes us wonder what it might have looked like in an untouched state. Otherwise, every original part is present: flat-head screws, bridge, heavy-knurled knobs, tuners, nut and even the uncut 'Broadcaster' logo on the headstock, placing this guitar before all the unpleasantness with the Gretsch Company.

If you've ever heard someone describe the Telecaster as a "plank," this guitar certainly fits that bill. There's a somewhat homemade quality about it, the feeling of the body against your ribs; it's as if Leo himself hadn't quite perfected his novel idea with its sharp edges and still-present tool markings.

Take the string ferrules on the back: Nick tells us to pay attention to the uneven spacing of the countersunk holes. "There was no routing template for this! If you ever see a Broadcaster with perfectly straight ferrules, it's most likely fake, or the body from a later Telecaster."

Sadly, we don't have the time to plug in but strummed acoustically, there's really only one word for it: loud. It's also an extraordinarily heavy guitar with gobs of sustain and a stinging midrange. With high action and jacked-up saddles, it plays like a bucking bronco.

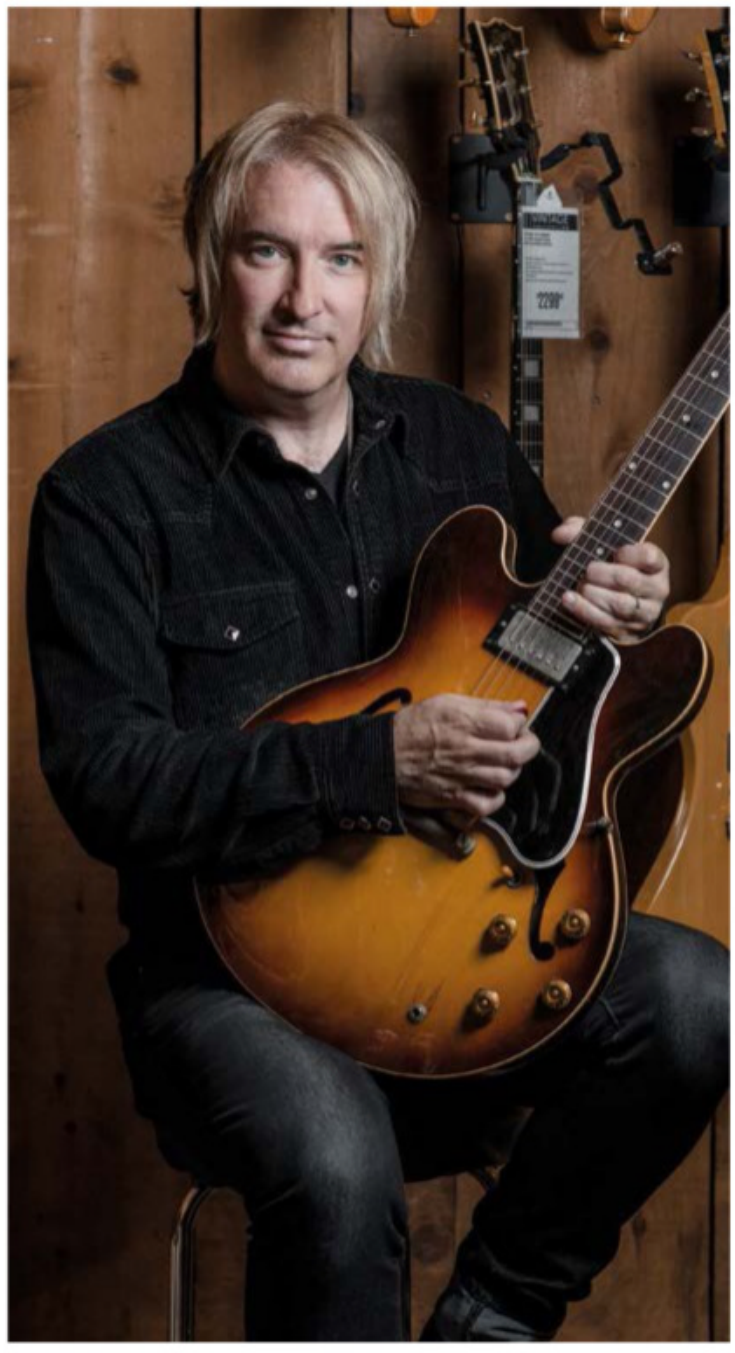
1959 TWO-PICKUP LES PAUL CUSTOM W/ BIGSBY

"I don't think I'll see another one of these in my lifetime," says Conte as he's handling a gorgeous '59 Les Paul Custom (see opening spread). What's so impressive about this guitar is that it only has two pickups instead of the usual three, a feature that

doesn't seem all that rare looking back from the present day. Believe it or not, there are only a handful of two-pickup Customs known to exist.

Unique features of this old Gibson include the Imperial buttons on the gold Patent Pending Grover Rotomatic tuners, a curious addition assumed to be legitimate given the matched age of the gold hardware on the guitar. The factory Bigsby has also lost much of its gold plating, worn away by years of use, imparting an air of class to this already classy instrument. There are pearloid inlays covering the spots where stoptail body inserts would normally be,

THIS PAGE Nick Conte cradles this 1958 Les Paul Custom Black Beauty



ABOVE An example of the walls full of desirable vintage gear on sale at Guitar Center Hollywood

TOP RIGHT The Jimi mural near the entrance to the store

MIDDLE RIGHT Lemmy and co immortalised in the Rock Walk outside

BOTTOM RIGHT Guitar Center artist relations manager Eric Bradley with the 1958 ES-335

a sure sign of Gibson installing the vibrato system after the body had been drilled.

1958 GIBSON LES PAUL CUSTOM 'BLACK BEAUTY'

This '58 Black Beauty is what the preceding guitar would've looked like if not for the special-order status. It's a complete example of the model, with its triple gold-plated PAF pickups, all-original aged hardware, amber switch tip and a perfectly checked, inky black finish. The original bill of sale in the original pink-and-brown case reveals it was bought from Van's Music Sales in Columbus, Ohio along with a Magnatone amp on 8 December, 1960. The sale was financed via Chattel Mortgage in Franklin, Ohio: "Back then, you could walk into any bank and they'd finance the purchase for you," says Nick.

With all of the rare and wonderful items in stock at GC's Hollywood location, it's easy to get lost in the magnitude of it all. However, our encounter with Nick and Eric leaves us feeling confident that Guitar Center's vintage team are just as excited about vintage gear as we are. Hollywood's in good hands, we think.

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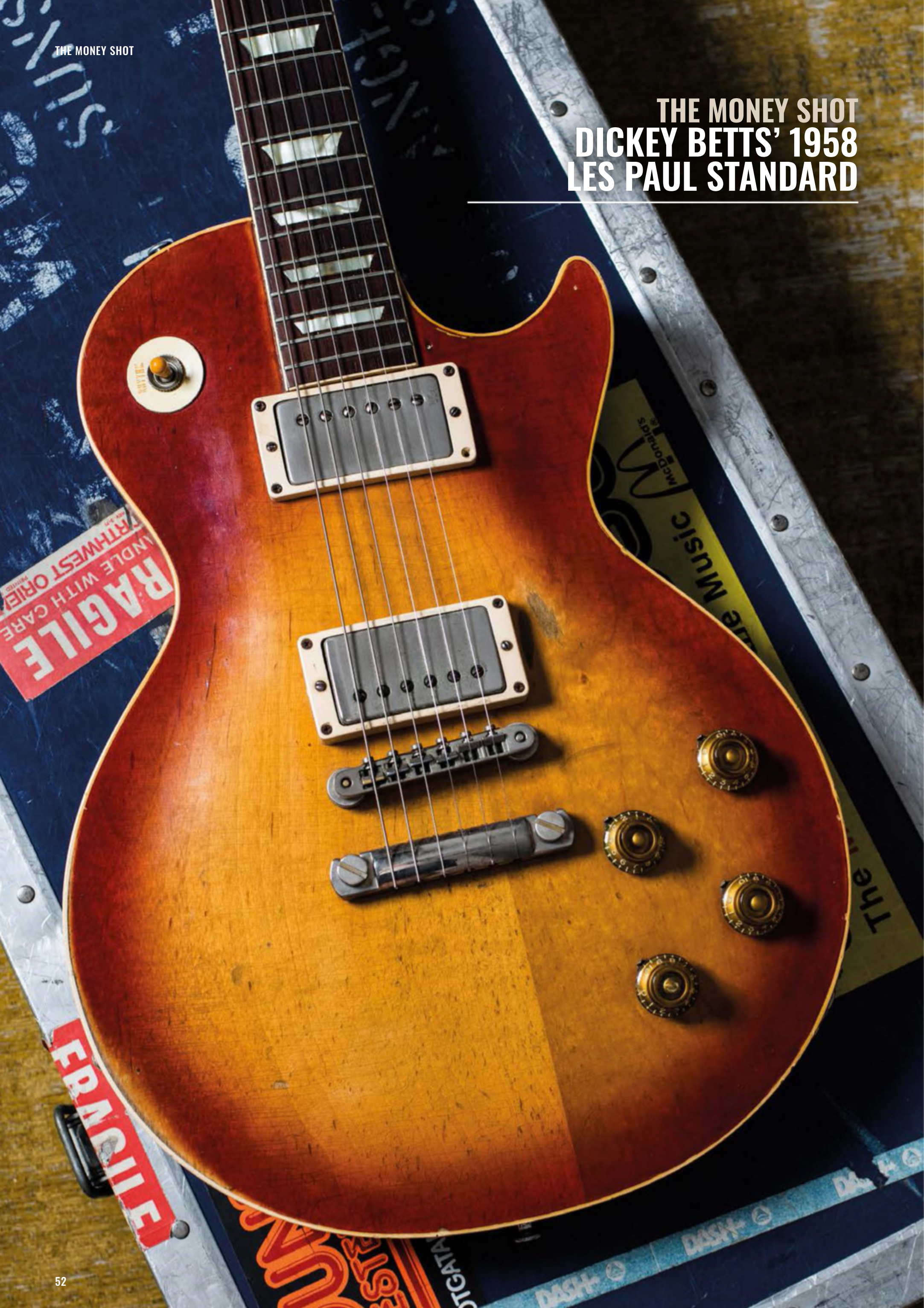
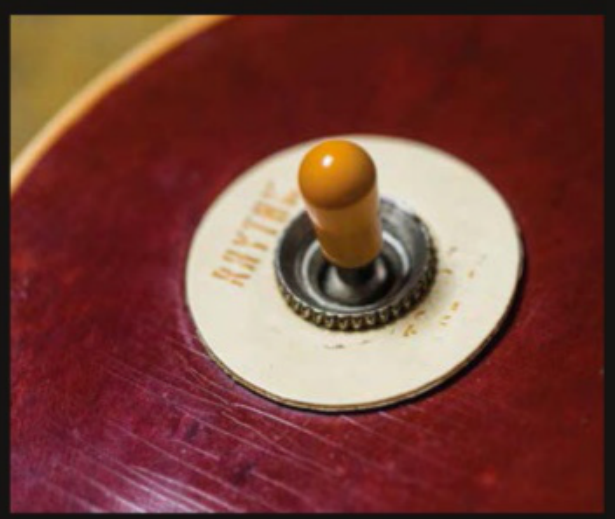
THE MONEY SHOT
DICKEY BETTS' 1958 LES PAUL STANDARD





Previously owned by two bona-fide members of the Southern-rock royal family in the shape of former Allman Brothers Band guitarists Dickey Betts and Dan Toler, this instrument was also the first sunburst Les Paul that a young Joe Bonamassa heard live on stage. "I was six years old and never forgot that evening," said Bonamassa, describing the 1983 encounter in New York State as "life changing".

The modern-day blues star was reunited with the pivotal Les Paul in May 2019 when its current owner, vintage-guitar dealer and collector Matthieu Lucas, took it along to a Bonamassa concert in Clermont-Ferrand in France. Joe used it onstage that evening.

Besides having a dark back, the eagle-eyed among you will spot that the guitar's plain maple top isn't centre-joined. This is an indication the '58 started out life as a Goldtop, with the sunburst refinish apparently applied at Betts' behest in the Gibson factory in the mid 1970s.

Along with a headstock repair, a refret and a set of Grovers, this LP may not have had the easiest life, but it's still cool as hell and is a fabulous playing and sounding instrument. *G*

To see more, visit mattsguitar.shop

BLACK FRANCIS

THE GUITAR INTERVIEW

For over three decades, Pixies have remained one of the most vital, interesting and influential indie-rock bands on the planet. Their impact can be measured not just in albums sold or classic tracks recorded, but in the myriad era-defining, festival headlining bands who eagerly name-check the Boston four-piece as a seminal and critical influence. But you won't hear anything about that from Black Francis. The Pixies' no-nonsense frontman and guitarist remains entirely unsentimental about his band or the impact they've had on the wider music world, much preferring to chat about their latest album, *Beneath The Eyrie,* his love of Telecasters, his commitment to "work" and why vintage guitars make him a better player…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPY** TRAVIS SHINN

Despite hailing from Boston, there's something about Pixies that has always resonated a little deeper with British fans than those back home – and it's a connection that has endured through the decades. "You know, we don't feel like we're an English band… but all of our connections are here," explains Charles Thompson IV, the man better known as Black Francis. "All the people that we work with closely tend to be English – our manager, our agent… even our road crew, they're all from Manchester!"

Sat in the comfortable surrounds of a London hotel suite – with Francis smartly turned out in a black suit, black shirt and dark shades – it feels like Pixies have come a long way from those early days. Does he ever worry that the band has drifted away from being the iconoclastic, angry college dropouts who tore the roof off small venues across this city in the late 80s?

"I don't know that we even have that mindset anymore, we just do what we do at this point," he shrugs. "It was more identifiable in 1986 as to what we *didn't* want to sound like – the music that we were not into. And most of that was in the commercial realm.

"Having said that, within the indie world there's probably a lot of music that's also being pretentious, or being confrontational for the sake of being confrontational. There's something about it that is not authentic – the word we'd use would be 'poser'. There's a lot of posers on both sides of that fence, but it's easier to throw darts at the commercial stuff. And I like confrontational performers, I think they're great! But it's not really our personality to be confrontational.

"I guess what we do is more subversive… I suppose in a way, that's how we kind of try to annoy the indie fans or other indie bands, by going and doing something that's really popular!" Francis smirks. "'Oh, yeah. You thought we were that? No, actually, we're now something else…' But it's all in fun. It's not like this kind of heavy platform that we're trying to promote."

WORKING MAN

That last comment reflects a mindset that is a constant theme throughout our conversation – while he obviously takes his music very seriously, Black Francis is not one to eulogise or aggrandise it. In fact, when we mention the laundry list of huge bands who have publicly cited Pixies' influence on their music – Nirvana, Radiohead, Weezer, Smashing Pumpkins and many others – his brow furrows, vexed.

"What are we going to do with that information?" he exclaims. "We all have egos, but we're not going to sit around thinking about what our supposed 'legacy' is. It's kind of boring. I can't really do anything creative with that information, personally. It doesn't work like that for me."

What creativity is for him, however, is good old-fashioned hard graft. "That's what it is. It's work," Francis says animatedly. "All artistic endeavour requires effort. It requires work. More than anything else – more than inspiration, more than influence, even more than aesthetic. For me, it just requires showing up and doing it. Talk to any painter, any photographer, any sculptor, any musician, any poet, any writer – it's showing up! If you gotta do the thing, then you gotta do the thing. That's really what it's all about.

"It's just setting up some drums, setting up some amps, singing into a microphone, trying to entertain the people that showed up. We're good with bookings, y'know? 'The gig's on Friday,' or whatever – whether it's a performance or a recording session. 'Well, I guess we need to get our ideas together!' It's not about 'waiting for inspiration', it's about doing work."

It's a decidedly practical and blue-collar way of thinking about music, and we can't help but wonder if that mindset has fed into the way that Pixies have always been a band that puts the music ahead of their personalities or ego on stage…

"I don't even know if it's that lofty, we're just kind of shy and we don't have a lot of dance moves, you know what I mean?" he deadpans. "So what can we do? Well, we can we can play a song at tempo. We can play various chords. We know we know how to make feedback. We know how to do surfy things. We know how to do funky things. We can inject a little bit of Americana or country into what we do. So there's certain forms that we're comfortable with, and we use whatever vocabulary we have."

SURFIN' BIRD

That vocabulary has been getting more of a workout of late – despite getting back together to tour in 2004, it wasn't until 2014's *Indie Cindy* that the band returned as a full-fledged recording entity. Since then, founding bassist Kim Deal left, replaced by Paz Lenchantin, who made her debut on 2016's *Head Carrier* – and now things continue apace with Pixies' brand-new seventh album, *Beneath The Eyrie*.

Given that the band seem to be very much into a record-making groove now, we have to ponder

“WE’RE TALKING ABOUT RECORDS. WE’RE NOT TALKING ABOUT SAVING THE HUMAN RACE HERE – OR AT LEAST NOT IN A BIG WAY. YOU GOTTA HAVE *SOME* BALLS!”

whether if that 23-year gap between albums was a result of some hesitancy on the band’s part to add to a canon that was so revered… and the answer is given typically short shrift.

“The thought might cross your mind, but we’re just talking about records here!” Francis chuckles. “We’re not *that* intimidated by the situation. So we just got on with it. We’re not talking about saving the human race here – or at least not in a big way. You gotta have *some* balls!”

Last year saw the 30th anniversary of Pixies’ most beloved and influential album, *Surfer Rosa*. Listening to *Beneath The Eyrie*’s powerful dynamics, heavy use of acoustics and scuzzy edge, you’d be forgiven for thinking that revisiting *Surfer Rosa* on tour before recording this album had something of an impact…

“We even asked ourselves that question,” Frank admits. “But I can’t say that it’s something we dwelled on. It was sort of like, ’Oh, this is interesting, to play some of the songs we haven’t played in a long time. I wonder if it will have an effect on our new songs? Okay… so what’s for dinner?’

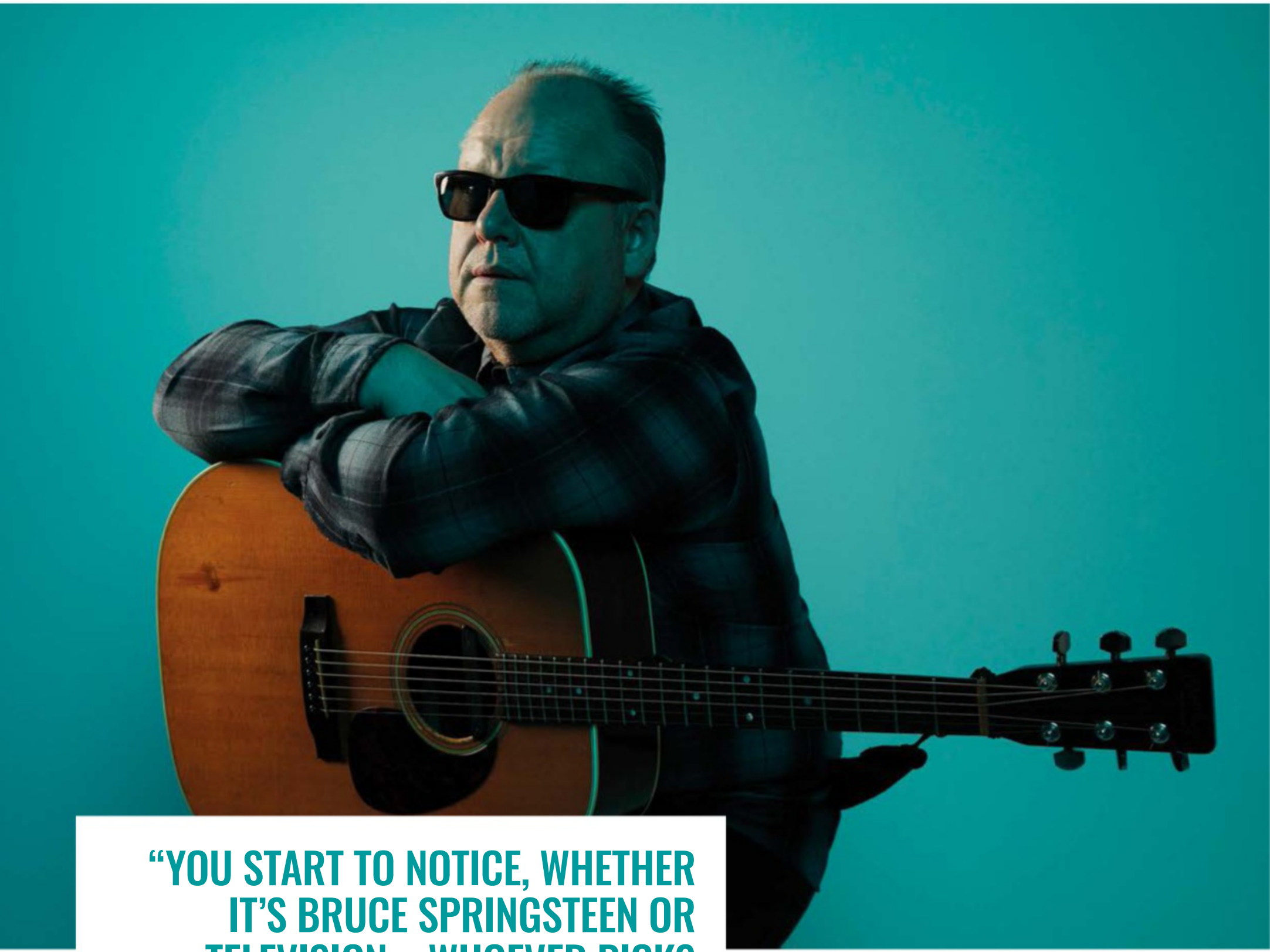
“It always comes out the way that comes out. If you try to plan it out too much you’re just going to be disappointed, because things just never go as you think they’re going to go. We don’t really have a lot of ’artistic vision’, other than we don’t want to be boring.”

It should come as little surprise then, that the band didn’t waste too much time obsessing over concepts or themes that would dominate *Beneath The Eyrie*…

“It was suggested that maybe it would be a little bit Gothic… but the discussion was as long as that!” Frank laughs. “It all depends on what the song dictates as to where we go with it. We have no problem playing more abrasive or dissonant music, we have no problem playing really sweet pop music – we have no problem playing any kind of music, though we tend to gravitate to what we can do, as opposed to what we can’t!

“We’re just reflecting back all the various things that we’ve heard, whatever we can get away with doing – whether it’s sounding like the Eagles or sounding like The Fall. They’re both valid.”

ABOVE Pixies (l to r): bassist Paz Lenchantin, drummer David Lovering, Black Francis and guitarist Joey Santiago



"YOU START TO NOTICE, WHETHER IT'S BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN OR TELEVISION – WHOEVER PICKS UP A TELECASTER, YOU NOTICE THAT IT HAS VALUE IN ITS LIMITATION"

LESS IS MOREISH

One of the most recognisable aspects of the Pixies' music has been their stark, abrupt use of dynamics – the much-imitated 'loud/quiet/loud' – but even here, it's something that Francis is keen to play down.

"We probably get a lot of credit for that, but that's not something that we invented – there's lots of music with dynamics!" he exclaims. "We learned pretty quickly that if everyone's playing at the same time, it just sounds like a big mess, so it's kind of like, 'Well, how about if two of us don't play right now?'

"We were in the rehearsal place, right back at the beginning and we were like, 'Is this good?' 'I dunno, it's *kinda* good.' 'How do we fix it?'

"The first way you fix it is you start to eliminate things. And very quickly, you realise, 'Oh, it sounds better now, because we made it simpler.' And then when you first start to work with producers, they do that even more. So you realise, 'Okay, less is more'. Until the moment you decide, 'Everything has to play right now!' and then it has to be dense!"

TELEMAN

Francis's first encounter with a guitar was when he picked up the nylon-string acoustic owned by his mother at the age of 12 and from the very outset, he saw the guitar as something of a means to an end.

"It's a tool of accompaniment if you're a songwriter," he explains. "For me personally, that's what it's for. Obviously, I've gotten better at having my own style or my own feel, so it's not like I'm not into guitar playing. It's just that it's more about songwriting for me than it is the *way* that I'm going to play."

That said, while the *way* he's going to play might not be something he's too worried about, *what* he's going to play clearly matters – Francis has rarely been seen without a Telecaster in his hands. His first, however – a Japanese-made Fender Contemporary Telecaster – was not exactly standard.

"It was kind of a heavy-metal guitar," Francis reflects. "It had a whammy bar and locked tuning [nut]. I would just take all that stuff out to make it more basic, because I wasn't that kind of a player. But

you could get it for like 400 bucks and it was a real Fender guitar!"

Before long, Francis came to appreciate that Leo Fender's first-born solidbody was uniquely well-suited to his guitar mindset.

"I learned over time that the Telecaster has a short sustain and it's bright, so it was very suitable for rhythm guitar for me," he explains. "Then you start to notice, whether it's Bruce Springsteen or Television – whoever picks up a Telecaster, you notice that it has value in its limitation. It leaves open some space for the guy who's got the pedals and is playing the solos."

The 'guy who's got the pedals' in Pixies has always been Joey Santiago. "He's almost the keyboard player," Francis explains of Joey's role in the process. "He has to find the right thing without getting in the way of the song, or getting in the way of the singer."

Does Black Francis ever wish that he was the guy doing the interesting and esoteric guitar stuff instead of holding down the rhythm?

"I get plenty of gratification in being the frontman," he winks. "I think if I was just a rhythm-guitar player in a band, and I wasn't singing… *that* might not be gratifying enough to my ego!"

TRUE VINTAGE

Given how he seemingly has little time for romance or sentiment when it comes to the process of making music, you'd expect Black Francis to be in the camp of guitarists who don't really care what gear they're playing, but in fact it's the opposite. Francis likes his guitars old – be it one of his two 50s Teles, various golden-era Martins or an old Gibson SG.

"When I got to be able to afford to buy really nice vintage guitars, that's what I gravitated toward! Now we're all-vintage," he says. "We've tried new guitars – if someone wants to give you a free guitar, it's like, 'It's a free guitar, I gotta try this!' But then it's, 'Oh… yeah, just give me the vintage one, please.' It just never sounds as good."

It's not just about having nice old guitars for the sake of it, however. Francis has a theory about why vintage instruments are the better choice for him…

"I think a lot of more 'rough' players probably get more of their tone from the gear," he elaborates. "Whereas a very proficient 'chops' kind of player, a lot of their tone is coming from their technique. I noticed that especially in the country-music world. A lot of those guys, they don't want or care about vintage guitars or amplifiers, because they don't need them! They're going to make it sing by the way that they play.

"When I first started working in Nashville, I noticed that. I was like, 'I can't believe Steve Cropper has like a Guitar Center guitar and a Guitar Center amp!' And then you hear these guys playing and it's like, 'Fuck! They don't need anything else, they've already got it!'

"Whereas with someone like myself, who is less of a chops player, I noticed that I'm better when I have an older guitar. There's more nuance and more overtones in the pickups coming through the amplifiers – there's more stuff for me to play around without even having to hardly play the thing!"

Whe it comes to acoustic intruments, while his beloved Martin dreadnoughts mainly come from the 50s and 60s, there's one that defiantly bucks the 'vintage is best' rule.

"I have one that I got in England that's probably like a 1985 or something like that," Francis tells us. "But now I've had it for 25 years or whatever, and it's been played in a lot, I actually play it better than I play my really vintage ones. Producers tend to like say, 'Play that one, because you actually play it better!'"

Typically, while many guitarists would blanche at the notion of gigging old Martins, 50s Teles, old 1960s Vox AC30s and the like, Frank's attitude to his gear sums his no-nonsense approach to being at the helm of one of the most important alternative rock bands ever.

"I bring all my vintage stuff with me on the road, I don't treat them as museum pieces," he insists. "I just play them until they break and when they break, I get them fixed. And if they can't be fixed, then I just throw it away. I don't care how much it's worth, it's just a piece of wood."

Pixies' *Beneath The Eyrie* is out 13 September 2019 on BMG. See pixiesmusic.com for more info and tour dates

LE ZÈBRE

SHEEPDOG TRAILS

Canadian guitar-slinger Jimmy Bowskill tells us about his love of British amps, his reluctance to use effects – and why learning different instruments can make you a better player…

WORDS LEE CALVERT **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

Anyone who has travelled extensively knows the sense of relaxation and happiness that coming home brings: and the smiling face of The Sheepdogs' guitarist Jimmy Bowskill tells that story. Four days after landing from a long stint touring Western Europe with the band, he's enjoying some downtime at his cottage a few miles outside Toronto – and he's in the mood to chat.

Bowskill's driving yet lyrical lead guitar has been the bedrock of the Canadian rock outfit since 2015, when a mid-tour departure saw the Juno-winning blues-rockers down a guitar player.

"They were in a real bind," he explains. "The previous guitarist was gone and I was friends with one of their guitar techs at the time. He recommended me and was so sure I would fit, he bet a week of his own wages on it!"

“I TRY TO PLAY A DIFFERENT SOLO EVEN IN THE SAME SONG EVERY NIGHT. IT’S NICE TO GET A LITTLE DIFFERENT INSPIRATION FROM A DIFFERENT INSTRUMENT”

THIS SPREAD Jimmy Bowskill uses his three-pickup 1968 Gibson Les Paul Custom and 1969 Les Paul Goldtop interchangeably, along with a 1973 Telecaster Thinline

Stepping into an unfamiliar situation at short notice was always going to be a high-pressure gig, but having someone else’s money riding on his performance certainly focused Jimmy’s mind in preparation for the audition. “They sent me a Dropbox with the tunes on and I stayed up all night learning and playing everything,” he recalls. “Then we rehearsed and I played the full set the night after.”

Clearly, he’s the sort of guitarist who thrives under pressure, as four-and-a-half years later – despite still dabbling with his previous band Blue Rodeo and working on a solo record he hopes will surface in the autumn – he’s still there.

HERE FOR A GOOD TIME

Bowskill describes The Sheepdogs as “good-time rock ’n’ rollers” and they certainly put on a proper show – the guitars are loud, the Southern-tinged blues-rock is ballsy and the 70s Americana outfits magnificent. But there’s depth here, too.

In between the hooks and singalong moments, you’ll find virtuosic guitar playing between Jimmy and Ewan Currie – the lead singer who also knows his way around a fretboard with aplomb. How easy does this Allman-esque ‘guitarmony’ – as it was described on the release of the latest album, *Changing Colours* – come about?

“It’s sometimes very easy, it depends on the tune. A song like *Cool Down / Kiss The Brass Ring*, which is a long joint instrumental…” he lets out a little sigh, as if transported back to a long studio session, “that took some time to put together, yeah…”

A professional musician since his pre-teen years – Jimmy was so young he wasn’t allowed to sit in the bar after gigs before being driven home by his dad (“he took zero-per-cent commission”) – he’s had a long time to settle on what works for him, gear-wise: a 1968 Les Paul Custom Black Beauty, a 1969 Les Paul Goldtop and a 1973 Fender Telecaster Thinline.

The Sheepdogs’ setlist is broadly similar on most nights, but Bowskill uses these guitars interchangeably, despite their differences in tone, sometimes playing whole gigs with the one guitar or mixing guitars throughout the gigs. “I like to keep it fresh and they all do something a little different. I also don’t really repeat solos, I try to play a different solo even in the same song every night. It’s nice to get a little different inspiration from a different instrument.”

Sitting behind this is an Orange head into a Marshall cab – perhaps not the most obvious choice for a Canadian band who play Southern rock.

“I love the sound of it. In fact, I’ve always loved English amps and I collect them,” Jim enthuses, clearly warming to the subject. “I have a couple of Marshall Plexis, some Hiwatts, Laneys, a Vox… But I started using this Orange as I used to use Marshall 18-watters for so long and I’d use two at the same time with matching cabinets. But the Orange is two EL84 power tubes, it’s basically the same as the two Marshalls, with one master volume and a little more headroom.”

For all the size of the head and cabinets, in direct contrast is a very small pedalboard. “I’m not a big effects guy,” Bowskill tells us. “You can do loads of cool stuff with them, but I’ve always been a ‘turn my amp up loud and use the volume on the guitars’ guy. If I dial it back to four or five, I can have a clean tone without losing much volume, then I can crank it up and get the same thing I would get with an overdrive pedal.”

That said, he’s not quite going direct. There are definitely some pedals lurking there for times when he can’t help but step on something. “I run an MXR Dyna Comp, which is great for slide; and an MXR

RHYTHM
TREBLE

RHYTHM
TREBLE

Les Paul
CUSTOM

RIGHT Jimmy is a skilled multi-instrumentalist whose playing disciplines all feed into his guitar work

108 Fuzz, which I use for the song *Feeling Good* only, a delay pedal for violin, and that's it!"

BOWSKILL BY NAME, BOW SKILL BY NATURE

Anyone who has seen Bowskill play will tell of his serious chops, from heavy blues-rock riffs, to screaming slide via in-the-pocket, Cropper-esque fills – he walks across it all. You'd presume that a player of his experience and skill must have it all locked down by this stage…

"I practise every day for at least an hour," he counters. "But at home, I only play acoustic and mostly blues flat-picking. The dexterity in those chops makes everything else easy and the dynamic control in being able to pick that fast just transfers so well to everything else. I also play a fair bit of pedal-steel at home."

Ah, the pedal-steel, which along with the already mentioned violin plus mandolin and a few others, are instruments that Bowskill wields with seemingly effortless class. "Guitar was first, then I moved through others," he explains. But surely lessons were required for the violin, given its tendency to reduce even capable musicians to sounding like they're impersonating a cat?

"I had one lesson for technique," Bowskill shrugs. Seriously, we ask – one lesson? "But," he explains, "I played mandolin already and it's the same tuning and neck scale length, so it kind of transfers once you have the bowing down."

But, given he considers himself a guitarist first, it's interesting to consider how all these instruments come through into his primary art.

"It does for sure," he elaborates, "especially pedal-steel. I've incorporated a lot more country-style, steel-lick bends and doublestop bends, chord bends, from my steel playing into the guitar."

Ensuring that all of his playing disciplines feed into his guitar work seems like a fine plan. "You know, it's kind of subconscious," he concludes. "It just kind of transfers on its own."

***Changing Colours* by The Sheepdogs is out now on Dine Alone. See thesheepdogs.com for more information**

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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

GREEN ON RED

If you've ever wondered whether vintage tone is in the wood or the pickups, turn the page as we check out a pair of custom-colour pre-CBS Fender Stratocasters that may help settle the issue…

WORDS HUW PRICE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

It's always a treat to get our hands on a vintage Stratocaster, but here we're really being spoiled. Both of these guitars are very special for entirely different reasons; one was owned and played by the golden-eared Eric Johnson and the other possesses a combination of features that may make it the only example of its kind produced by Fender during the pre-CBS era.

GREEN MACHINE

Gibson Les Paul Standards from the late 1950s are rare guitars. Flying Vs and Explorers are rarer still, and Modernes are so rare that some question whether ever existed at all. In contrast, Stratocasters from Fender's golden era are seldom associated with rarity because they were made in such huge numbers – after all, ease of mass-production was kind of the point, and the genius of the instrument's design.

Gibsons were made by hand, using painstaking traditional methods and the factory produced a very extensive range of models. Stratocasters are essentially flat pack guitars and Fender produced relatively few models, so what would make this 1963 example not only rare, but potentially the rarest of all vintage Stratocasters?

The most obvious answer is that it's finished in Surf Green, which is a seldom-seen custom colour. But more thrillingly, the body appears to be korina – or African limba, if you prefer. It was only after its current custodian ATB Guitars acquired the guitar and removed the neck that the discovery was made.

By 1963, Fender had begun using 'paint sticks' when bodies were being sprayed. Always attached on the bass side of the neck pocket, they allowed the person spraying the guitar to hold the body and alter the angle, and then hang the body up while the lacquer dried.

Removing the paint stick would reveal a large area of bare wood inside the neck pocket and it's helpful if you're trying to determine whether the body is ash or alder – the two wood types commonly used for Stratocaster bodies back in the day.

There are, however, rare exceptions. The most well known are mahogany bodies, and examples do pop up over a fairly wide early 1960s date range. Less well documented are the korina-bodied Strats, and documented examples all originate from a fairly narrow time window that spans the end of 1963 and very early 1964. In other words, the start of the L-Series.

KEY FEATURES

1963 FENDER STRATOCASTER
PRICE £POA
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Korina body, bolt-on maple neck with Brazilian rosewood veneer fingerboard
HARDWARE Vibrato bridge, single-line Kluson tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x single-coil pickups, master volume control, 2x tone controls, 3-way blade pickup selector switch
FINISH Surf Green
SCALE LENGTH 647mm/25.5”
NECK WIDTH 42.2mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 25mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.6mm at nut, 56.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.28kg/7.2lb

Why Fender briefly used korina is anybody’s guess. The switch from ash to alder was made to speed up the finishing process, and since korina is open pored like ash, it would have been a backwards step.

It could be that some korina was delivered by accident and Fender didn’t want to waste it, or there was a temporary shortage of alder at Fender’s timber suppliers. It could also be because korina turns yellow amber under clear lacquer and that would have obviated the staining process needed for sunbursts.

ATB’s korina Strat is noticeably light in weight when you pick it up and it’s in such pristine condition, you get the odd sensation that it’s a recently manufactured guitar. A clear indication to the contrary is the way that the mint-hued but mint-condition pickguard has shrunk back very slightly, exposing the aluminium shield beneath and pulling the pickguard screws inwards.

Although the neck lacquer retains its pale, factory-fresh appearance and there are no signs of playwear or checking, the metallic paint in the decal has begun to oxidise and acquire that vintage greenish tint.

It’s interesting to note that nobody has ever attempted to tweak the neck relief without first detaching the neck to expose the truss-rod screw. As a result, the area of wood and green lacquer immediately in front of the truss-rod remain in perfect condition.

Fender used some lovely Brazilian rosewood for slab and veneer ’boards: if you love wood figuring, this is a really fine example. It varies in shade from dark chocolate brown to near ebony black, with vivid grain patterns in some areas. Beside a few deposits of grime in the control-pot mouldings, there’s scant evidence that this guitar was ever played. The bridge and saddles are essentially factory fresh and there is not even a hint of corrosion on the vibrato block.

ABOVE TOP LEFT The nitrate guard has shrunk back considerably to reveal the edges of the aluminium shield plate

ABOVE BOTTOM LEFT The grain pattern and colour of the wood indicate that this is an ultra-rare example of a korina-bodied Strat

ABOVE All the wiring appears factory original and there’s the outline of a 50s-style shield on the underside of the 60s-style aluminium shield

ABOVE LEFT Wood burr along the rout is thinly coated in lacquer, which indicates Surf Green is the only colour ever applied to this body

ABOVE RIGHT Besides a small patch on the letter 'F', the Surf Green guitar's decal is in fine condition

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT The Fiesta Red Strat's decal has shrunk over the decades and the original outline can still be seen

The colour of the body is somewhat unusual and it differs somewhat from what we're used to seeing on more modern 'Surf Green' guitars – including Custom Shop Relics. No doubt a darkening of the clear coats has caused this change because under the pickguard and spring cover we can see what Surf Green must have looked like when it was freshly applied.

Although we cannot state categorically that it's an original factory finish, with its paint-free screw holes and very natural lacquer checking, we see nothing to indicate that it isn't.

Having access to a 'closet classic' in extremis also reveals other interesting details. The frets are undoubtedly original and almost unplayed. Consequently, we can see that Fender levelled frets but didn't bother crowning them. Faint file marks are clearly visible and every fret is more or less flat across its entire width.

There is a question mark over the saddles, because the tooling marks that are usually evident on the flat area at the back – on all but the rustiest examples – are missing. They are also quite shiny and the lettering stamps look a bit shallower than usual. Since the saddles can corrode and tarnish far sooner than the automotive-quality chrome plating Fender used on bridge and jack plates, it's possible that a previous owner decided to have the saddles re-plated to keep their appearance on a par with the rest of the guitar.

STAR GUITAR

Eric Johnson is one of the finest players ever to have picked up a Stratocaster, so clearly any Strat he considered good enough to play live and use for recording is going to be a stellar example. This Fiesta Red model from 1961 comes in its original candy-loaded brown Tolex case, along with a picture of Eric playing the guitar and a handwritten letter that confirms that not only did the star own and use it extensively on stage and in the studio, it's one of the "two favourite rosewood neck Strats" he's ever owned. High praise indeed.

Looking at this well-preserved example, it's easy to see why Fiesta Red was often erroneously referred to as 'salmon pink' back in the day. It looks nothing like the anaemic farmed fish, but surprisingly close to the wild Alaskan variety.

This Fiesta Red is blown over Dakota Red, which is sprayed over a Desert Sand base coat. Where the

KEY FEATURES

1961 FENDER STRATOCASTER
PRICE £42,250
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in USA
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with Brazilian rosewood slab fingerboard
HARDWARE Vibrato bridge, single-line Kluson tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x single-coil pickups, master volume, 2x tone controls, 5-way blade pickup selector switch (original but modified)
FINISH Fiesta Red
SCALE LENGTH 647mm/25.5”
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.1mm at nut, 55.2mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.4kg/7.5lb
CONTACT ATB Guitars atbguitars.com

lacquer has chipped or rubbed away, you can see the yellow-stained alder beneath. Remember, this is the era before Fender began using Fullerplast.

By any standards, the finish is in great shape for a 1961 Strat, but it’s obvious that this guitar has been well used in addition to being well loved. The front is in better shape cosmetically than the back, which has some odd but not unattractive spiral-shaped marks. They may be dents, or areas where something hot melted the finish. The pickup covers and knobs are in fantastic condition, having turned very slightly

ABOVE RIGHT Judging by the immaculate fingerboard and pale clay dots, the 'board may have been levelled when the guitar was refretted

ABOVE BOTTOM RIGHT The guitar's original brown tolex case contains a letter of provenance from Eric Johnson along with photos of him playing the guitar

creamy and developed verdigris in the lettering. The pickguard is perfect too, retaining a lighter shade that's more mint than pistachio.

The slab 'board is unquestionably Brazilian rosewood and it's in amazing condition, having been levelled when the guitar was refretted. We can't say if the refret was done during Eric Johnson's custodianship, but the work was clearly performed by a first-rate luthier.

The fretwork is faultless – so good, in fact, that the perfectly smooth and flat fingerboard is the only real giveaway that any work has been done. Fretwire of a vintage sympathetic gauge was used and there's no evidence of sanding along the edges of the 'board or repaired chips on the top. All hardware appears correct, including the tooling marks at the rear of the saddles, and the single-line Kluson tuners. The screws in and around the pickguard are rusty, to a greater or lesser extent, but it's all part of the vibe.

A couple of modifications have been made to the wiring and components. Eric Johnson is known to prefer having the middle-pickup tone control shifted to the bridge pickup, and that easily reversed modification is still in place. Unusually, the original three-way pickup selector has been modified to operate as a five-way switch – making the in-between positions easier to find.

Fender made a lot of Fiesta Red Strats in the pre-CBS era, so this guitar's most distinguishing feature is the grain on the neck. The maple has very strong and clear lines that run across the headstock face and along the back of the neck. It also appears closer to flat sawn than quarter sawn.

IN USE

We begin by comparing the overall feel of both guitars. The Fiesta Red 1961 model has a fairly standard weight for an alder-bodied, early 60s Strat, but you don't need weighing scales to discern that the korina instrument is lighter. There's little to choose between the necks; the Surf Green guitar has a slightly rounder depth, while the Fiesta Red has more of a classic 1960s feel, starting out skinny and gradually filling out towards the body.

It's serendipitous that we get to try the Surf Green Strat while we're in the process of working on a korina Epiphone Flying V. Korina is a light timber, which we have already noted, but experiences with the Flying V suggest it also has a very loud, bright and airy tone. That's very much the case here, because the

HALF
GAUGE
MEGA
FEEL

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ABOVE TOP LEFT Wear on the body reveals Dakota Red, Desert Sand and yellow stained alder beneath the Fiesta Red finish

RIGHT Although the guitar retains its original three-way switch, somebody has ingeniously converted it to a five-way

green Strat sounds very different to the red model – or indeed any alder-bodied, veneer 'board Strat from this era. The acoustic tone is airy, conspicuously bright and doesn't generate a lot of low end.

In contrast, the former Eric Johnson guitar is darker, much thicker in the midrange and extends lower. In other words, it's a lot more balanced across the frequency range. Korina actually sounds way closer to swamp ash than alder, but it's perhaps not as strong in the bass or as compressed and to our ears, it's also the loudest of the two.

These acoustic discrepancies carry over into the amplified tones, with the '61 Fiesta Red producing a smooth and full-bodied growl. In contrast the '63 Surf Green is noticeably brighter, clearer and more spanky. It looks and feels like an early 60s Strat but sounds and responds more like a mid-50s example, so cognitive dissonance abounds.

An airy treble characterises Strat pickups from this era, so the korina serves to exaggerate the effect. Even so, it never veers into shrillness and we perceive a greater degree of clarity and detail. However, where the green guitar snarls, the red guitar roars and we find each pickup setting distinct yet equally enjoyable. The alder-body guitar sustains better, too, with that smooth and fluid quality that is so much part of Eric Johnson's tonal palette.

The Surf Green '63 is hard to beat for crystal-clean Hendrix tones, wiry blues and cutting funk rhythms, but we find ourselves favouring the neck and middle pickups and rarely venturing onto the bridge. In a straight shootout, the sonic differences between korina and alder are clear and obvious. The green '63 Strat is a fascinating rarity, both in terms of colour and sound, but it's some distance away from the quintessential early 60s Strat tone of Eric Johnson's former squeeze. G

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THERE'S LIFE
BETWEEN
9 AND 10

ASK THE AMP GUY

In the first instalment of a new column, Rift Amps mainman Chris Fantana dispenses expert advice on all things amplification. Kicking things off is a question relating to those oft-misunderstood glass bottles we hold so dear…

Have a burning question about your amp, or worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

Hi Chris. How can I tell when it's time to replace a valve in my amp?
DAVE JOHNSON, VIA EMAIL

Hi Dave, that's a very good question and one that has far too many answers for my liking. It should be straightforward, but in reality, it rarely is.

In theory, a valve should have a working lifespan of anywhere between 1,000 and 5,000 hours for common types and up to 8,000 or so for the more rugged industrial/military-spec variants.

Unfortunately for us guitarists, we never seem to get anywhere near those numbers and always fork out for replacements sooner than we'd like. Guitar amplifiers have always pushed the design limitations of valves – we're actively encouraging distortion, right? – so we suffer shorter lifespans as a result.

So what does this mean for you? I'm assuming that your amplifier isn't exhibiting any symptoms and has been running fine for a while. If so, I've always told my customers to expect their power valves (EL34s, 6L6s, 6V6s etc) to last somewhere between eight months and two years with regular use, and preamp valves much longer than that. I usually don't bother to replace those until they're making strange noises.

The first thing for you to do is a visual inspection of each valve, starting with the larger power valves. Any discolouration of the screen printing indicates that the valve has been running hot and may need replacing. Gently remove the valve from its socket and give it a little shake. Can you hear a rattle? This too might indicate a worn valve.

Some amplifiers require the bias to be checked and adjusted when replacing the power valves. Your local tech will be able to advise if this is needed and carry out the work for a small fee.

The preamp valves, however, are easier to test. With the amplifier turned on you can use a pencil to lightly tap each valve listening for and pings, zings, or crackles that'll usually indicate it's time for a replacement. Swap in a known good valve into that position and repeat the test to confirm. These are plug-and-play types, so no rebias is required.

However, if the amp isn't running as well as you think it should then it would not harm to try swapping in a new set of valves, one at a time, to see if there's an improvement.

Common symptoms of worn-out valves include excessive noise or hiss, lack of treble or bite, muddy or undefined bottom end, and erratic changes in volume or tone.

If you're gigging, carry a spare set of valves or at least one of each type your amp needs, so you can replace them if necessary. Learn the valve types that your amplifier uses, their location on the chassis and how to change them. Learning how to do this now will make doing so on a dark stage much less frantic.

One final thing – if you've got an important gig coming up and your amplifier is working well, I'd advise against replacing the valves in advance. Although I'm an advocate of preventative maintenance, new valves have a higher chance of failure owing to infant mortality, whereas your older-but-working-okay tubes will most likely carry on for quite a while without a hiccup.

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BELOW A valve's lifespan can typically vary from anywhere between 1,000 and 8,000 hours of use. And vintage valves can also remain usable for decades

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COLLECTION

ON THE TUBE

They may never have hit the big time as young guitar slingers, but in later life, Doug Fraser and Pat O'Donnell have found fame as successful YouTubers. We catch up with the guys at Doug's studio in Portland, Oregon…

WORDS HUW PRICE **PHOTOGRAPHY** KEITH BUCKLEY

There are many reasons why *The Doug And Pat Show* stands out amid the congested world of guitar-related YouTube channels. There's no denying its hosts are somewhat older than most other guitar YouTubers and they have a collection of vintage guitars and amplifiers that's bewildering in its quality and scope. They can also be laugh-out-loud funny, but a serious and analytical approach underlies their equipment tests, and the gear is always the star of the show. Doug begins by telling us how he met his partner in tone.

DISCO DISGUST

"Back in '71 or '72, I was playing in local bands and working in a music store and Pat walked in one day," he recalls. "I had really long hair at the time, but Pat's hair was down to his butt and he came over and asked, 'Are you the guy with the '56 Les Paul Custom?'. I got the guitar out, and we started talking about guitars and music.

"At the time, disco was starting to get popular, and we detested it, so we decided we'd put together a band that played Les Paul guitar music. We called it 'The Heavy Metal Thunder Band', you can see one of our posters in the background on the show. We played around Portland, and we used either Les Paul Juniors or Sunburst Les Pauls through 50-watt Marshall Plexis."

At that time, the vintage-gear scene was in its infancy, but did the guys have to trade up, or were they able to jump straight in at the deep end? "Well back then, things weren't really that expensive," Pat explains, "they were just used guitars and since we didn't use effects pedals, if we wanted a Telecaster sound we would just buy a Telecaster and it was the same with Bursts.

"Then all of a sudden, I'd be playing a club and I'd look around and see that I had maybe five guitars on stage for all the different sounds. Then it was six and then it all went from there. I wouldn't say that we are really collectors, but we do have a lot of usable stuff."

WINNING THE OSCAR

Pat's '58 Goldtop 'Oscar' features regularly on the show and Joe Bonamassa could barely put it down when he was a guest. Pat tells us how he found it all those years ago: "Well, I had a small guitar shop with mostly vintage guitars back in the 70s. I already owned a sunburst Les Paul, but I thought it would be real cool to have a Goldtop with humbuckers, too.

"So, I called George Gruhn and he told me Northern Prairie Music in Chicago had one. I called them and spoke to Paul Hamer, who later started Hamer Guitars. He wanted $1,500 for it, and it was too much for me, but we settled on $1,200. I still play TV Juniors, but Oscar just sounds so good we use it a lot. Oscar's neck is kind of like a cross between a '58 and a '60 profile. It just fits, and it's not real big."

"It's not really like a '60," Doug clarifies. "Joe Bonamassa said: 'This is a slightly lower-profile '58 neck.' It's not huge. When we started doing the show, I hadn't played that guitar ever and Pat probably hadn't played it in a while. As we were going through the guitars, I plugged Oscar in and after playing it for about 10 seconds, I said: 'You have got to be kidding me.'

"It was the best-sounding Les Paul I had ever heard. So, in the first show we did Jane, Pat's early 1960 Sunburst, and Oscar. Jane sounds really good, but Oscar is the king."

"Well, maybe not the rhythm pickup," Pat chimes in. "The rhythm pickup is a little darker because it reads about 8.2k and the bridge is 7.6k. We don't know if that's the reason it sounds like that."

The tale of how Pat got Jane is right up there with Billy Gibbons' Pearly Gates story. "Oh man, that must have been late '69 or early '70. There was an old boy up in Stanfield Junction, about 175 miles east of Portland and he had the guitar, but he wanted a colour TV set. He took the guitar into a little shop in Pendleton and traded it. I went up to the store the next day, I didn't even know they had the guitar, but the owner was a friend of mine and he said: 'I've got to show you this guitar.' I opened the case and said 'Uh… this is nice.' I ended up paying him $300."

"The guy really put the screws to Pat on that one," Doug adds with a chuckle. "The guitar was only about 11 years old when I first saw it, but it was like a Leonardo da Vinci painting, with all the surface cracking. It already looked old, and it hasn't really changed since then."

Having owned and played vintage guitars for so long, we ask if the guys consider age to be a key factor in tone, or whether those guitars were great from the get go. Doug's response is unequivocal.

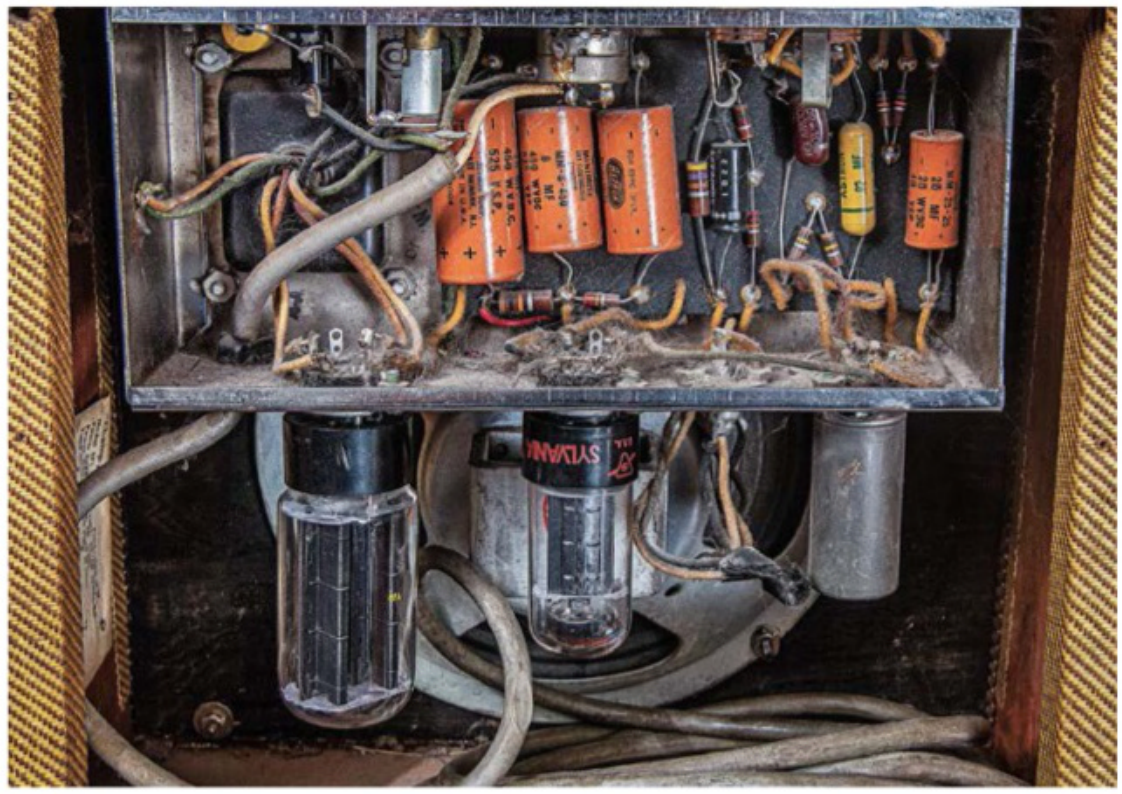
"Let's talk about ZZ Top's first album. They recorded that in late '69, so Pearly Gates was 10 years old. The Beano Burst was just six years old, but the last chorus of *Hideaway*, where he just hits that note,

OPPOSITE (l to r) 1955 Les Paul Custom, 1963 SG/Les Paul Custom, 1960 ES-355, 1957 Les Paul Custom

ABOVE, LEFT The SG's Sideways Vibrola unit up close

ABOVE, TOP RIGHT Jane, a 1960 Les Paul Standard...

ABOVE, BOTTOM RIGHT ...paired with the 1958 Goldtop known to the show's viewers as 'Oscar'



ABOVE, LEFT It's not all vintage Gibsons for Doug and Pat, either, as this modified Heritage H-150 from 1994 demonstrates

ABOVE, TOP RIGHT The Vox AC10 Super Reverb Twin is the main amp used in the show

ABOVE, BOTTOM RIGHT Doug and Pat also "love the thickness" of tweed Fenders

well, that changed everything right there. We might subscribe to the tonal differences being down to the quality of the wood, but not the age of the wood."

ACE AMPS

The guys are pretty keen on British amps and have single-handedly revived interest in the somewhat obscure Vox AC10 SRT.

"I was totally enamoured of Brian May's sound," Doug explains. "The high end he got and that explosive quality was what I was looking for. Pat and I were playing together around '77 and I had a 50-watt Plexi through a 4x12 cabinet, a '70 or '71, and it sounded great, but it didn't have that top end.

"Then I found out that Brian May was playing those English Vox amps and here in the US, we didn't see many. Because of the Thomas Organ thing, our idea of Vox amps was that they were pieces of shit. Then a guy walked into my music store with an AC50 head.

"He said: 'This amp is rubbish, it keeps screwing up,' and he left it with me to fix. I opened it up and there was an internal fuse that was arcing. I popped the fuse out, bent the clip back and it sounded fantastic. There was the top end I had been looking for. I told the owner it was fixed and he said: 'I don't care, I'm going to sell it, would you give me $50?' So, I did.

"Then I got into proper AC30s, but I still couldn't quite get that Brian May sound. I was the only guy in the Portland area using English Vox amps, so people used to offer them to me. A guy got in touch and said: 'I've got a Vox amp and I don't know what it is, are you interested?'

"He brought [the AC10 SRT] over and I took it to my rehearsal space. I plugged it in and after playing it for a few seconds, I go, 'Oh my god, this is it, this is what I've been looking for.' I'd pre-amp it up to boost the level and it would go into god's own compression and retain that top-end harmonic thing.

"That was 1985 and I used that amplifier in clubs, four or five nights a week, cranked. Everybody would ask, 'How do you get that sound?', but it was only when we started doing the show that this model started to get better known. The reason we use it is that it gives the best demo of high-quality guitars and what they can do.

"Pat scored one too, hunting it down in his usual fashion, like a snake in the grass. Pat was on the phone calling music stores all over the country and he

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was told by a number of Vox 'experts' that the AC10 SRT didn't exist. They don't sound like anything else, but the reverb is just terrible.

"I started using my AC10 with ceramic Celestions, because they're really loud. Then somebody traded in a Super Beatle cab that had been cut in half and when I plugged into that to test it, it was like the blanket came off. It was so loud, so chimey, so hi-fi and yet it loved that overdriven sound. When I looked inside there were Silver Alnicos. I think they're as important to the Vox tone as everything else is."

"We like Gibson amps, too," admits Pat, looking a tad sheepish. "We've got maybe 12 or 15 of them. And all the different versions throughout the 50s. They all sound great in their own way. The late-50s ones are a little more gained-up and I really prefer those, although I do have to say that when Doug was playing Oscar through the '55 GA-40 with the P12Q Jensen on the show, that was the closest we've ever come to that ZZ Top 'Brown Sugar' tone."

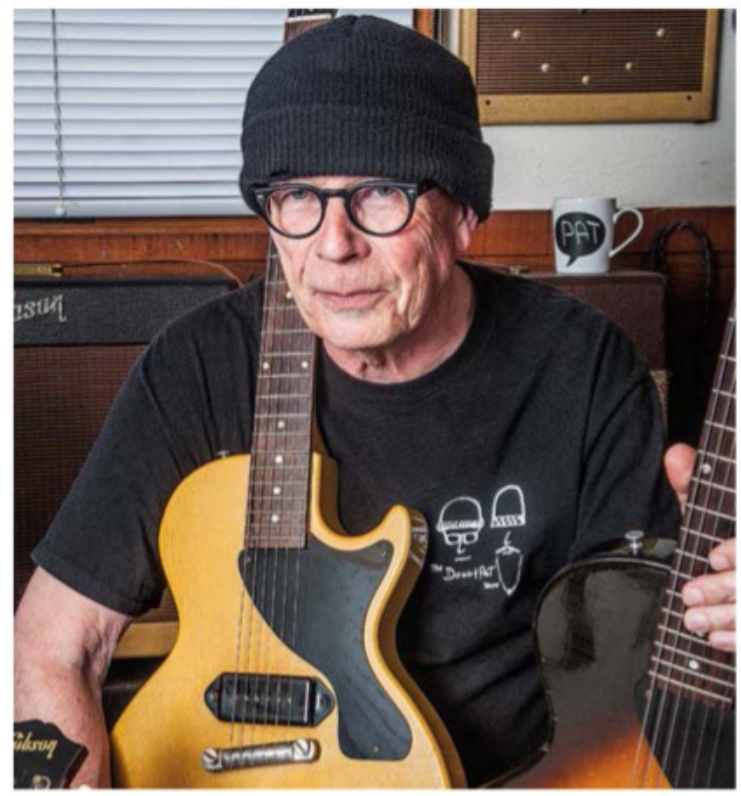
"We love the thickness of tweed Fenders," adds Doug, "but those Gibson amps have personality that's off the charts. Given the choice, we'd play a later Gibson GA-40 and they cost half as much."

GOLD STANDARDS AND SPECIAL TREATS

Oscar isn't the only Goldtop in *The Doug And Pat Show* arsenal, and Doug fills us in on all their models. "I have a '52 without the neck binding and it's one of those stories that's hard to believe. I was in Portland, going to a Goodwill store, which is where I get all my fancy clothes. Anyway, I was walking down a side street and there was this guy on his front porch playing this '52 Les Paul and I'd never seen one like that before.

"I asked him about it and he said he needed to get rid of it so he could move back down to the Bay Area. He wanted $125, so I got the money together and bought it. I just like the way it sounds, but it plays terrible. My '54 has the wraparound tailpiece and it just sounds amazing. I've also got a '56 with a stripped top, and it sounds completely different with the Tune-o-matic bridge."

The guys have a pair of 1950s Les Paul Customs and we ask how they compare with Les Paul Standards. "The '57 Custom has a more slender neck," Pat offers, "and with that centre pickup it's a bit harder to play. It also has the really low 'speed' frets, which we're not fans of. The other one is a '55, and although it has the same frets, it has a fatter neck and



it has the staple and P-90 pickups. It doesn't have the same output or growl as the '54 Goldtop, but it has its own sweet sound."

"The '57 Custom is a little brighter," Doug suggests, "and both of those guitars have mahogany bodies without the maple caps. The staple neck pickup is a really sensitive beast, but I don't think it sounds anything like as good as the equivalent Standard with the P-90s."

"I've got a '57 Special that's extremely clean and it sounds great," says Pat. "My other one is a red early '61 double cutaway and I just love that guitar. It's got a little bit thinner neck than I really care for, but I'm such a big fan of P-90s. In fact, I was going to put some on Oscar, but Doug talked me out of it."

"I've got a re-fretted '56," Doug adds. "I've used it onstage and for recordings and it has so much personality that for some people it sounds as good, if not better, than a Burst. I do session work here in my studio and people send me Pro Tools tracks to overdub. When they hear the tones they say: 'Oh my god, what is that?'"

As the guys are long-time fans of Gibson's 'student' models, we ask if Juniors are really better than Specials? "They sound different," Doug and Pat respond in unison. "People say that the Special's rhythm-pickup magnet sucks some of the tone," Pat continues. "My first good guitar was a '55 Junior, which I still have. I just love Juniors. If you plug one into an AC10, man you don't have to think when you play, because you just sound great."

"Juniors are extremely versatile guitars", Doug says, "and they were made every bit as good as the high-end Gibsons. They were just simpler, but why they sound different to Specials, we just don't know."

SHOWTIME

Pickup testing is a regular feature on the show, but the test guitar is relatively young model. "It's a '94 Heritage H-150, but I bought it in '95 used," Doug explains. "That guitar has been our benchmark for a really affordable, high-quality Les Paul-type guitar. The quest was to make it sound really great and we think that we did. We've replaced everything on the guitar, and right now we have Amber Spirit Of '59 pickups installed."

"There was a noticeable difference when we changed the pots and the hardware," Pat chimes in.

"Well, the original pots were 250k", Doug recalls, "and the Schaller pickups sounded like razorblades.

THIS SPREAD A 1960 Junior, a 1957 TV model, a Custom Shop Reissue TV model and a pair of sunburst Juniors propped up against a wall of vintage Gibson amps

ABOVE Doug owns a refretted '56 Les Paul Special but he also loves the versatility of the Les Paul Junior: "They were made every bit as good as the high-end Gibsons"

“WE’RE SHOWING PEOPLE THE OPTIONS. OUR WIVES THOUGHT WE WERE THE MOST UNBALANCED, DORKY IDIOTS EVER... UNTIL JOE BONAMASSA CAME OVER”

ABOVE A very early 1952 Les Paul sans neck binding and a wrapover model from 1954 (also pictured right)

The replacement pots are 525k and it has real bumblebee capacitors.”

Doug explains the thinking behind their YouTube channel. “We basically took the same thing that Pat and I have been doing since the day we met, which is endlessly discussing vintage guitars. Our wives thought we were the most unbalanced, dorky idiots ever… until Joe Bonamassa came over.

“We started out doing comparisons of boutique PAF replicas, because nobody else was able to compare them with real ones and we just kept going. The other thing we’re doing is showing people the options. We’re not endorsing anything, you’ll never have one of our videos stop in the middle for an advertisement and we don’t make any money from this. We do other things to make money. We’re just guitar guys talking about guitar stuff.” *G*

See *The Doug And Pat Show* at youtube.com/DFraserHomes

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FUCHS AUDIO TECHNOLOGY

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

Andy Fuchs has become one of the most respected makers of valve amps on the planet. The man himself explains how his company grew from his basement into one of the boutique-amp world's biggest draws…

How did you become involved in guitar in the first place?

"As a 12-year-old whose parents owned a music store, there were always opportunities to try out instruments. I played drums and flute, but always felt comfortable on guitar, which my mom also played. Mom taught me how to count the middle section of *Black Dog* by Led Zeppelin!"

When did you first start building or tinkering with amps?

"Also at about 12, I started developing a curiosity about all things electrical. I was 'that kid' who would drag home a broken TV set, tape recorder or stereo equipment and try to fix it. My parents encouraged that curiosity by getting me some used test gear and a soldering iron.

"After my share of shocks and soldering-iron burns, my dad got me a job working in the local neighbourhood TV store. He wanted me not only to learn things correctly, but not kill myself!

"After high school, I took tech-school courses in TV production – and even worked a year or so at an NY-area TV station – but while attending that school, I started working at the famous We Buy Guitars on NYC's 48th Street Music Row.

"Eventually, I started working for New York Audio Labs, which was manufacturing high-end tube electronics for audiophiles in upstate NY. It was both a job and like going to school. Then I moved to have a successful career in the architectural field, selling building systems like fire alarms, sound, card access, cameras and the like."

How did you get the Fuchs Audio Tehnology business off the ground?

"When my last 'big band' Omega broke up, I got some money from my share of the band from the sale of our sound gear and our truck, which I used to start the business. I never really thought about it being more than a glorified hobby until it took off.

"The business started in my house. I was lucky, as I had about 500-square feet of free space in my basement and as many as three people working for me! In the beginning, I would go to work and my workers copied my work from the previous evening. I still look back and marvel that I worked a full 50- to 60-hour-a-week day job, ate dinner with the family and went to the shop and worked sometimes till two or three o'clock!

"Eventually, my pop got sick with ALS and I started to rethink my priorities. I'd had a 'cardiac event' from stress and realised I needed a life change.

"I'd serviced an early Dumble (sans goop) and took notes, so making a clone was easy. I immediately realised, for me, as a player, it had to have reverb. I spent about two or three years integrating a reverb and a loop that didn't suck tone or affect the feel of the amp. I still use derivatives of those same circuits 20 years later.

"I never thought, 'I should find me a pile of cash from investors.' It did extremely well for itself at a time when doing D-style amps was in its infancy. When competition swelled, I started looking at adding the more affordable Casino amps and embellishing the original Dumble concepts into my own.

"While I still love and respect what Howard Dumble did, I always looked at it like a work in progress. While it's understandably become legendary, I felt he stopped at a given point technically. With advances in DC tube-filament regulation, high-voltage FETs, super-low noise FETs and such, it was ripe for modernisation, in my humble opinion."

At what point did you feel like the brand really established itself?

"I think when we became a NAMM Show fixture and people sought out our booth and endorsers and stores came to us asking to get products. I was at an amp show and Paul Rivera, who I respect, came up to me and said: 'You guys showed up and appeared out of nowhere and really established yourself in the marketplace quickly' – maybe it felt quick to him! Reinhold Bogner was another guy who had some kind words for us."

"FOR ME, AS A PLAYER, IT HAD TO HAVE REVERB. I SPENT ABOUT TWO OR THREE YEARS INTEGRATING A REVERB AND A LOOP THAT DIDN'T SUCK TONE OR AFFECT THE FEEL OF THE AMP"

How did you come up with your best-selling product?
"The Blackjack-21 II has been our 'home run' amp. In the mid 2000s, I put out the first-series Blackjack. It was affordable – a 20-watt snot rocket, basically, to offer competition to my friend Mike Zaite at Dr. Z. While we sold an impressive amount, my friend Teddy Gordon at Make'n Music in Chicago said: 'What you need to do is what you do best and what your customers want. Make a Blackjack-type amp, but do some channel switching and maybe even reverb!' Game on!

"So, I sat down and did exactly that and the series has done extremely well for us. The basic DNA of our amps (the preamps anyway) doesn't vary greatly through the line. It's a known and successful sound I didn't want to mess with."

What would you regard as your proudest moment as a maker to date?
"It's tough to nail down a specific event, but things like when we discover completely by surprise that an artist like Derek Trucks loves his ODS and records with it all the time. Meeting, jamming and hanging with Les Paul was a thrill. Meeting the legendary Vinnie Bell was a thrill! Having the likes of Carlos Santana, Warren Haynes, Gregg Allman and Jimmy Herring not only as personal friends, but Fuchs users, is truly heartwarming."

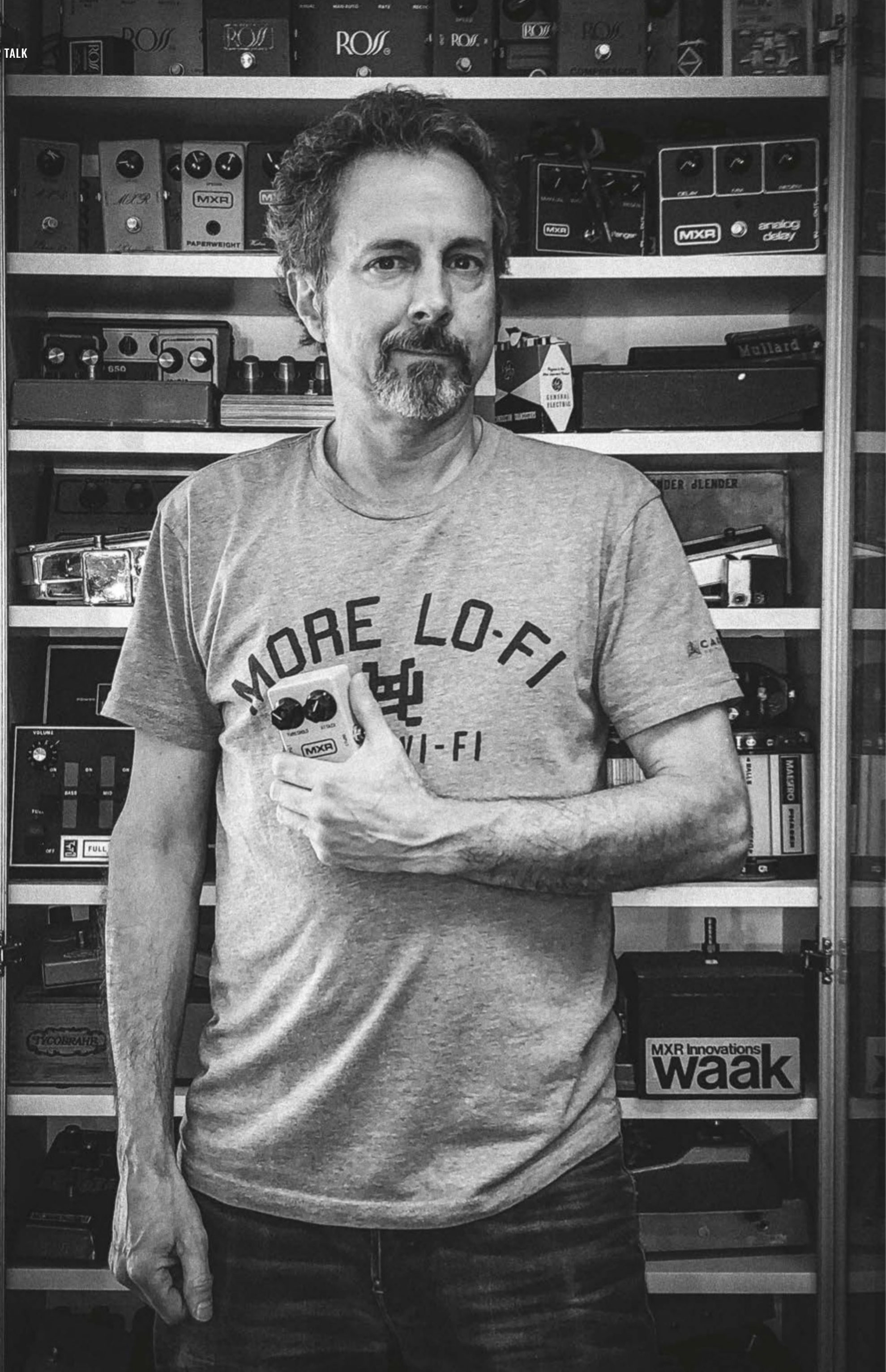
What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the guitar industry in 2019?
"It will be interesting to see how the industry evolves over the next year or two. It seems every few years, someone heralds the death knell for the guitar and yet it continues to thrive.

"I think it's interesting to see how many guitarists have also returned to real tube amplifiers after having had years of modelling. I don't think that will go away, but rather coexist.

"Advanced technology is bringing us interesting things like the Quilter stuff or the Roland modelling amps, which certainly widens the palette, but it's wonderful that people still appreciate how good a musical partner a good tube amp can be to a player who appreciates it."

What's next for Fuchs?
"I have a few ideas for a new amp series in the Marshall style. I've seen some Friedmans and Bogners come through the shop and they are doing some great things. I think with some of the innovations in my power-supply technology, grounding and some circuit tweaks, we could be a contender in that arena!" G

For more about Fuchs Audio Technology at fuchsaudiotechnology.com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MIKE PIERA

ANALOG MAN FOUNDER AND PROPRIETOR

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

For over 25 years, Mike Piera's Analog Man has been at the forefront of the guitar world's enduring fascination with vintage and boutique effects – first as a modder and now as a trailblazing manufacturer. Here, he explains how he started out and how he's developed Analog Man while remaining true to his ethos…

Look back to those heady days when guitarists were rediscovering the glories of vintage standalone analogue effects pedals – but well before the ongoing boutique boom was underway – and there's one man who bridged the divide: Mike Piera. His company Analog Man granted countless artists access to the succulent sonic glories of golden-age stompboxes and the tone fiend is still going strong.

Piera's Analog Man has developed a top-flight reputation in the industry not simply because he was among the first prominent makers to improve and reintroduce several classic designs, but because he did it *right*.

To this day, Analog Man pedals define that tricky convergence of small-shop attention and appeal and professional production standards that has come to represent the pinnacle of the work of so much of the boutique-effects industry. And for all that, the company still maintains its slightly gritty, homegrown, built-in-the-back-room appeal.

At this stage, so many prominent artists have used Analog Man pedals that Piera finds it easier to note that just about every one of his guitar heroes has used his pedals than he does to start rattling off names. Still, Jim Weider, Mike Rutherford, Steve Hackett, Ed O'Brien, Brad Whitford, Noel Gallagher, Steve Rothery – and so many others – are definitely names worth mentioning. It's an enviable position for a pedal nut to be in, yet for all that, the Analog Man ethos hasn't really changed since the brand's inception more than 25 years ago.

ABOVE The Analog Man range has expanded to cover the entire gamut of vintage tone machines, plus some clever updates to classic designs, too

BIG IN JAPAN

Having been into electronics since childhood, when he'd put hobby time into the DIY and experimenter kits his parents would buy him, Piera segued into audio electronics in the mid 70s for the same reasons that so many underfunded young guitarists did. Those

nifty little boxes were expensive, but if you could repair and build your own, there was a lot of sonic value for money to be had.

Fast-forward a decade, and Piera earned a degree in computer science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, during which he also studied electrical engineering. After graduating, Piera took a job nearly 7,000 miles away. And this, ironically, is when his sideline in vintage American guitar gear first took root. "I was working in Japan in the mid 80s," he tells us, "and learned about American vintage guitars over there, through the fantastic shops and magazines. In the USA it was still pretty quiet, maybe because the vintage dealers could pretty much sell everything they could get to Japanese dealers.

"With the prices I saw, I realised I should be buying guitars in the USA and selling them in Japan, so I found a new dealer in Tokyo, Ken Guitars, who was happy to take my guitars on consignment. I could make a huge profit, though it would take time to sell them. Soon, the guitars got harder to find and the internet changed everything. So I started finding vintage effects and concentrating on them, as there were only a few big vintage-effects dealers."

Being an engineer himself, Piera inevitably went deeper than just buying and selling pedals. "When I found them I would take them apart, fix them, study them, and document everything," he says. "Software engineers won't do *anything* without documenting it. I would sell them along with some guitars and amps at guitar shows and in ads in *Vintage Guitar* magazine, using the name Analog Man starting in 1993 at the first Classic American Guitar show in Long Island, New York.

"I also got into modifying Tube Screamers about then, as the TS808 was much harder to find and more expensive than the TS9. I studied them and found the difference and got the needed JRC4558D chips in Tokyo on my trips. There was no internet or Google to find parts back then. I had no idea if they were even available in the USA."

"WE DON'T HAVE OUR PEDALS ON SHELVES READY TO SHIP. WE BUILD THEM AFTER GETTING THE ORDER, SO WE CAN DO THINGS THAT NO OTHER COMPANY OF OUR SIZE COULD DO, OR WOULD EVEN WANT TO DO"

BELOW Analog Man successfully combines small-scale boutique appeal with top-of-the-line workmanship

THE WEB WE WOVE

Can we even recall those dark, cold, cave-dweller-like days before the internet entirely dominated modern life? Or what it was like for the vintage-gear hunter or info-crazed DIY enthusiast when all we had was – what? – books, magazines, and libraries? Mike Piera does, and as a computer engineer right at the heart of the beast, he also remembers the web's quirky, geeky, oft-forgotten predecessor, that dial-up Unix-to-Unix network known as Usenet.

"Before the World Wide Web, we had email lists and Usenet," Piera recalls, "and the people on the guitar and effects groups were mostly scientists and engineers like me, as nobody else used computers. So we shared ideas, mods, repairs, and projects, and I offered up the 808 mods and was surprised how it took off. I would modify pedals on my lunch break or after dinner. When vintage effects started getting hard to find, I decided to try to make some.

"The Small Clone chorus was popular due to Nirvana but hard to find and easy to break, so I chose that as our first hand-made pedal, and we are still making them today.

"Soon, we came out with the Ross Compressor-based CompROSSor, which lead other companies to success, too, as we could not make them fast enough. Then we slowly grew from there."

ABOVE Mike Piera's childhood interest in experimenting with electronics has never left him

By the late 90s, Piera was tiring of software engineering, as the wiles of one iteration of the Windows operating system after another stamped its demands on the industry. He was already in pretty deep building new pedals and selling both those and old ones and meanwhile, the majority of mass-produced pedals left a lot to be desired – "all digital crap that lasted just a few years". Midway through 2000, he decided to go full-time and launch Analog Man proper, in the same Connecticut location where the company remains today.

"I was hoping the pedal fad might last another 10 years or so," he tells us. "After several years, the effects market got huge and with the internet getting new users every year, more guitarists were getting online and learning about our pedals. We had one of the first websites with pedals on it, before Gibson or Fender even had websites. We were selling more pedals than we could believe, or ship, just as the economy crashed. Sales got slower, but we hung in there and now sales are as good as ever."

MARKET SHARE

Ah, how quaint those early days of the boutique pedal market as seen from this saturated, eternal-boom-time perspective of 2019! How many of us – with no access to Google – need more than the fingers of one hand to count off the genuine small-shop pedal makers who existed circa 1997? A real fanatic might even get onto their second hand, but it takes some thinking. Suffice to say, things were a little different then and even if it would have seemed open season for a boutique manufacturer to make a killing in such a thin market, plenty of makers fell by the wayside less than a decade into their runs. Analog Man, for its part, had a few mainstays to keep the business going.

"Nobody was making a chorus like ours when it came out, or a compressor like ours," says Piera, "so it was easy to be better or unique. Anyone could make a clone of a pedal that was not available, and they would sell quite well. A lot of people made just a few pedals, then gave up. Even Way Huge closed shop, just at the wrong time before the explosion, after making an amazing number of excellent pedals in a very short time.

"Back then, most of us were really into the tone and parts used to get the classic sounds, and preserve your guitar tone. Fulltone and Prescription Electronics were the biggest boutique brands, along with Way Huge at the time, and made great pedals, mostly based on the classics. There's not as much of that anymore. Many once-boutique brands now have their pedals mass-produced at automated factories, so things have come full circle. By staying the same, we are sort of unique again."

What always made Analog Man different, however, was the degree of customisation and special-order available in its pedals. In maintaining the by-the-order business model with which he'd begun the venture, Piera offered something that players couldn't get from most makers.

"We don't have our pedals on shelves ready to ship," Piera adds, "we build them after getting the order, so we can do things that no other company of our size could do, or would even want to do. It's very inefficient and difficult, but we do our best to allow as many options as we can handle. Our Sun Face fuzz can be ordered in 2,800 different combinations, with over 20 transistor choices. Some people, like me, like simplicity and elegance, while others like complexity and variations. We try to make both happy."

SETTING THE STANDARDS

Alongside the customer-driven ethos, Piera has undoubtedly tapped his own love of the archetypal classic-rock, prog-rock, and British blues-rock tones. And if many players continued to similarly value the originals, arguably far more have come to appreciate the ease of attaining that sound in a more ruggedly built new pedal that doesn't constantly break down mid-set, nor flatline your investment when it does. Piera's plundering of and improvements to many of

“WE REALLY DON’T NEED ANOTHER TUBE SCREAMER OR BIG MUFF, UNLESS IT’S REALLY DIFFERENT, LIKE A BIG MUFF WITH ORIGINAL PARTS”

ABOVE Mike standing in front of a selection of Analog Man’s tone-testing gear

the long-deceased circuits that enable these sounds has therefore generated the bulk of the Analog Man line.

That being said, he insists: “I would not build something that was already available, especially from the original manufacturer if they’re still actually around. Some of the pedals we make have become available again, as the Ross Compressor did recently, as the effects world is still somehow growing. But we really don’t need another Tube Screamer or Big Muff, unless it’s really different, like a Big Muff with all original parts… maybe someday!”

With all the wild and wonderful new designs hitting the market from other sectors, Analog Man’s continued success with several abiding standards indicates it’s difficult to outdo the classics… unless it’s with the kind of clever, creative modification and functional update at which Piera excels.

The CompROSSor, Bi-Comp (CompROSSor and Dan Armstrong-inspired Juicer compressors in one box), and Bi-Chorus (dual analogue choruses, and Piera’s personal favourite) are perennial big sellers, and while the King Of Tone – a dual-overdrive pedal that takes its TS808 inspirations into the stratosphere – has been the biggest seller overall, Piera says a lot of Sun Face fuzz pedals have sold just this past year.

Central to all of these, and to every one of the company’s builds, is the Analog Man principle that good guitarists know what their guitars sound like and they don’t want a pedal to change the sound or the feel of the instrument. “All of our pedals need to keep your tone and feel,” he says, “unless it’s something that’s *supposed* to change it. I find that choosing the right capacitors can usually make a circuit sound better. We can use much more expensive parts than a huge company, as we don’t use tens of thousands of the parts. Things like pots and jacks are also important, and really make a difference in tone and reliability.”

A HARD ROAD

When asked what exciting developments might be in the Analog Man pipeline, Piera reveals a personal tragedy that has, unsurprisingly, slowed the R&D process in recent years, while also telling us he’s slowly finding his way forward again. “I spent most of the last few years taking care of my wife Ayako,” says Piera, “who built almost all of our compressors and chorus pedals until about a year ago. We lost her early this year to complications from cancers. I am still catching up on work before I can get new products developed. But I should have mini Juicer compressors available soon, and some other mini versions like Mini Bad Bob with a battery, and maybe Mini Sun Face with a battery or power jack.

“Also, I would like to manufacture the distortion pedals I have been using for years. My lead guitarist says my best tone is one of those stacked with CompROSSor and KOT… I just wish we had 30-hour days so I could keep up with my work *and* do some new work.”

For all the successes, and in light of his seemingly unerring knack for reworking the classics into functional and toneful pedals for today’s players, there’s still the occasional white whale that Piera just hasn’t been able to crack. To wit, one enduring British fuzz legend: “The Tone Bender MKII is a great pedal, and I’m a huge Zeppelin head, so I made several but only one was killer. Now I have some other transistors that might work better, so I hope to look into those again. We made a MKI for Johnny A to use with The Yardbirds and it came out awesome. I love that breaking-up fuzz sound, but again the transistors were tough to find. I will see if something else could work.

“Most companies our size can’t mess with these things as it takes much too much time to get and test the parts, and you just can’t make many of them. But I like doing these things, it’s one of our specialities since the original NKT275 Sun Face. I am very happy with our MK1.5 and MKIV Sun Benders, I think they hang with any on the market at twice the price. So it would be nice to complete the set!”

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THE RUNDOWN

PORTABLE AMPLIFIERS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Whether you're a busker, need public-transport-friendly backline for an open-mic night or just want an amp that's ready to go at a moment's notice, these are the best portable amps on the market

1 BLACKSTAR SUPER FLY
£199

The latest addition to Blackstar's hugely impressive Fly range ups the size and the power. With two three-inch stereo speakers and 12 watts of power, the Super Fly has the punch to be heard on busy street corners and with independent channels for both guitar and mic, you can play and sing to your heart's content. There are modes for acoustic and electric (the latter offering clean and drive), plus a three-band EQ and built-in reverb on both vocal and guitar channels. You can also expand it with an extra cab.

2 BOSS KATANA-AIR
£330

Boss's Katana range has earned rave reviews for its great sounds, functionality and keen prices, but the Air might be the most high-tech Katana yet. Billed as the world's first truly wireless guitar amp, the Katana comes with a wireless guitar adaptor that plugs into any jack socket and promises up to 12 hours of play. With 20 watts of power, two three-inch speakers and Boss's digital amp and effects software (with editable presets), it offers huge versatility for on-the-go electric guitarists as well as cable-free practice.

3 PIGNOSE HOG 20
£155

Pignose has been making great-sounding battery-powered amps since the 1970s, where it earned a reputation as the go-to warm-up/jam amp. The Hog is the bigger brother of the Legendary battery-powered practice amp, offering 20 watts of solid-state power from a 6.5-inch speaker. The Hog is light on frills but big on fun, with just gain (squeal), volume and tone, plus a pair of inputs and a headphone out. The Hog also comes with a built-in rechargeable battery that offers six to 10 hours of play time.

4 YAMAHA THR10
£229

Yamaha's compact THR range was a revelation when it launched back in 2011, inventing the concept of the desktop 'lifestyle' amplifier. With 10 watts of solid-state output power and a pair of full-range three-inch speakers onboard, pop in eight AA batteries and you can take the THR wherever you want. And with the range of sounds it offers, you should want to, with Yamaha's Virtual Circuit Modeling tech delivering pleasingly authentic sounds and feel from the five different electric-guitar options on offer.

5 ROLAND CUBE STREET
£228

Roland CUBE amps have been a constant presence on street corners all over the globe for years, offering a keen balance of tone, portability and price. Since 2008, the five-watt, battery-powered CUBE Street has been catering even more smartly to buskers with a projection-friendly wedge-shaped design, a pair of 6.5-inch neodymium speakers and independent inputs for mic/line and guitar. Roland's COSM modelling offers six onboard amp sounds (including acoustic) and six onboard effects.

FISHMAN LOUDBOX MINI CHARGE
£429

6 Larry Fishman has been one of the foremost architects of amplified acoustic sound. The Loudbox Mini condenses that knowledge and experience into a portable package. The Loudbox Mini pumps out 60 watts of clean acoustic sound with separate channels for both guitar and vocals, each sporting a two-band EQ and reverb to dial in to taste. The guitar side also offers chorus to add further depth to your sound, and Bluetooth for backing tracks from your phone.

AER COMPACT MOBILE 2
£1,350

7 If you're an acoustic player looking for a portable, rugged high-end amp experience, German brand AER has been the first port of call for many. The Compact Mobile 2 offers AER's reliable build, tone and sleek styling, but with portability thanks to the built-in rechargeable battery. Based on the popular Compact 60 combo, the Mobile 2 offers 60 watts of output from the eight-inch, twin-cone speaker, with independent channels for vocals and guitar, independent EQ and built-in effects.

FENDER PASSPORT MINI
£125

8 Fender's Passport is technically a mini-PA system, but this bijou version packs in a wealth of modelling options. Rather than having to fiddle around matching amp models and effects, however, Fender has instead condensed everything into 24 selectable presets that built from eight classic Fender amp sounds, plus effects ranging from delay and reverb to chorus and flange. At just seven watts, it's not going to blow heads off, but the useful carry handle also doubles as a kickstand to help your sound project.

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dunable custom guitars

Los Angeles

Sasha Dunable makes some scarily good guitars in Glendale California. We had one through as a trade in a while back and were so impressed that we contacted Sasha and got him to build some for us.

Fender

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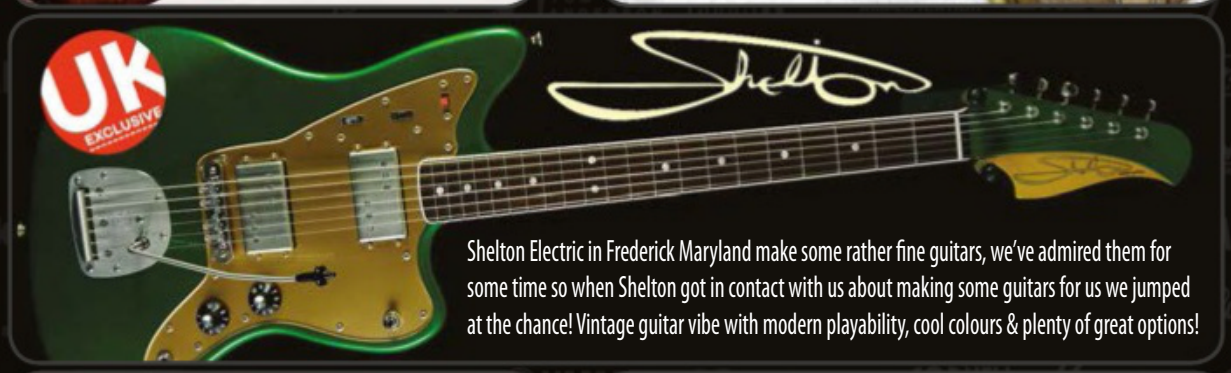

Shelton

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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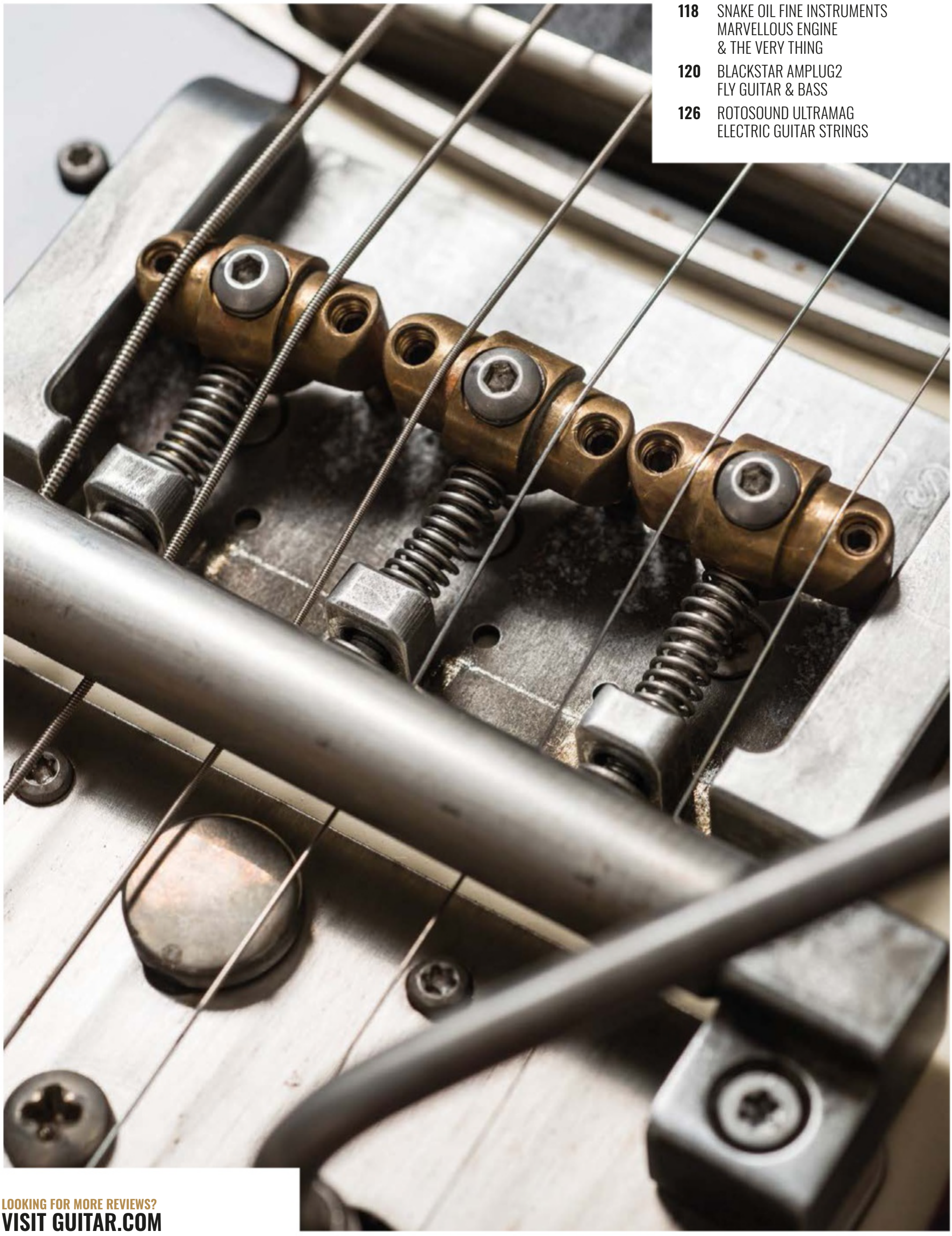

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FIDELITY GUITARS
STELLAROSA

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Public Service Broadcasting and The Horrors are fans – and Dave Grohl played one recently on stage. If you're after an inspiring retro electric with an identity all of its own, it's time to get hip to Fidelity Guitars…

It's not unknown for boutique guitar manufacturers to go deep into the well for inspiration, but not too many builders are referencing the Japanese-made Stella Japonica, made in very small numbers at the dawn of the 1960s. Yet that's exactly what inspired the Fidelity Stellarosa – a collaboration between Fidelity Guitars owner and luthier Matt Oram and Mojo Pickups mainman Marc Ransley.

Fidelity Guitars are handcrafted in Cambridgeshire, UK. With each instrument made to order, the current lead time is around six to eight weeks. The range also comprises the JB and Double Standard electrics and the Thundermaker bass, but the Stellarosa sits at the top of the tree, taking the catalogue-guitar aesthetic of the rest of the line and adding custom metalwork, unique electronics and celluloid tortoiseshell binding.

Indeed, there's a lot of tortoiseshell on display here, with the double-pickguard (3mm acrylic this time) certain to polarise opinion. We love it, along with the medium-aged Olympic White gloss nitro finish. Although the 40mm-deep body is chambered swamp ash with a torrefied swamp-ash top, our review guitar still weighs in at a substantial 9.2lb. Happily, it balances superbly on the supplied Heistercamp strap – with so much metalwork at the body end and Fidelity's compact headstock design, there's precious little chance of neck dive.

A trio of Mojo's P-90-sized Charlie Christian pickups are housed in custom metal surrounds and adjustments are made – along with almost every other screw or bolt on the guitar – via Torx-head screws. If, like us, you have an untidy tool drawer that only contains Phillips and flat-head screwdrivers and an assortment of mystery Allen keys, you'll be relieved to find Fidelity has included the tools you need in the Hiscox case.

The bridge is Matt Oram's own billet aluminium design that's backless to facilitate use with a vibrato, with a trio of brass Gotoh SW-3 saddles. The vibrato in question is actually a Fender USA unit, although Oram has customised the top plate and fitted a Bigsby B7-style tension bar to increase the break angle across the saddles and help promote sustain.

The neck bolts are screwed into threaded-steel inserts (Matt recently made

The Fidelity Guitars billet aluminium bridge features three brass Gotoh SW-3 saddles

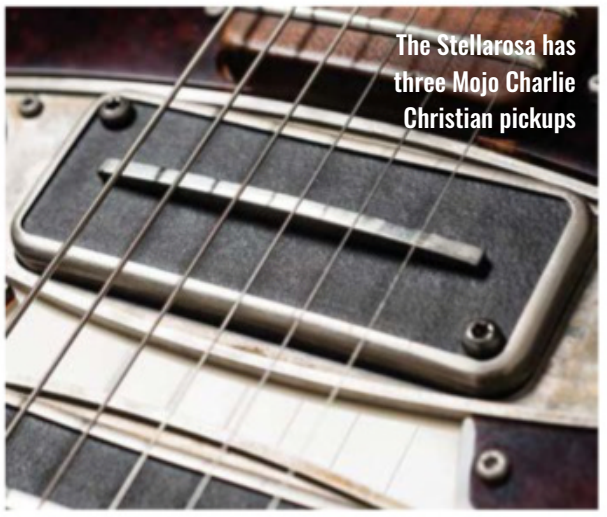
KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,499 (including Hiscox case and Heistercamp strap)
DESCRIPTION Double-cutaway chambered-body electric guitar. Made in UK
BUILD Chambered swamp ash with torrefied swamp ash top. One-piece bolt-on torrefied maple neck with zebrawood 'skunk stripe', 9.5-14" compound radius, oil finish, clay inlays, 21 medium-jumbo frets and polished bone nut
HARDWARE Fidelity Guitars billet aluminium bridge with 3x brass Gotoh SW-3 saddles, Fender USA vibrato with custom top-plate, Gotoh SD91 Magnum Lock tuners
ELECTRICS 3x Mojo Pickups P-90-sized Charlie Christian pickups with custom surrounds, master volume with treble bleed circuit, no-load master tone control, 2x 4-way rotary pickup selector, 2-way toggle circuit-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25"/635mm
NECK WIDTH 41.4mm at nut, 49.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.8mm at first fret, 25.0mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 33.5mm at nut, 52.4mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.17kg/9.2lb
FINISH Gloss Olympic White nitrocellulose with medium ageing (as reviewed), Blood Orange Burst, Gloss Black, Sonic Blue, Shell Pink
OPTIONS Relic'ing level specified by customer, Wenge and Wenge/maple neck options available
CONTACT Fidelity Guitars fidelity-guitars.co.uk

the switch from brass to steel following a few issues with brass being too soft), while the neck itself is one piece of torrefied maple with a zebrawood 'skunk stripe'. The oil-finished maple smells as good as it looks and its deep caramel hue suggests that the level of heat treatment applied by the chef was 'well done', rather than 'medium rare'.

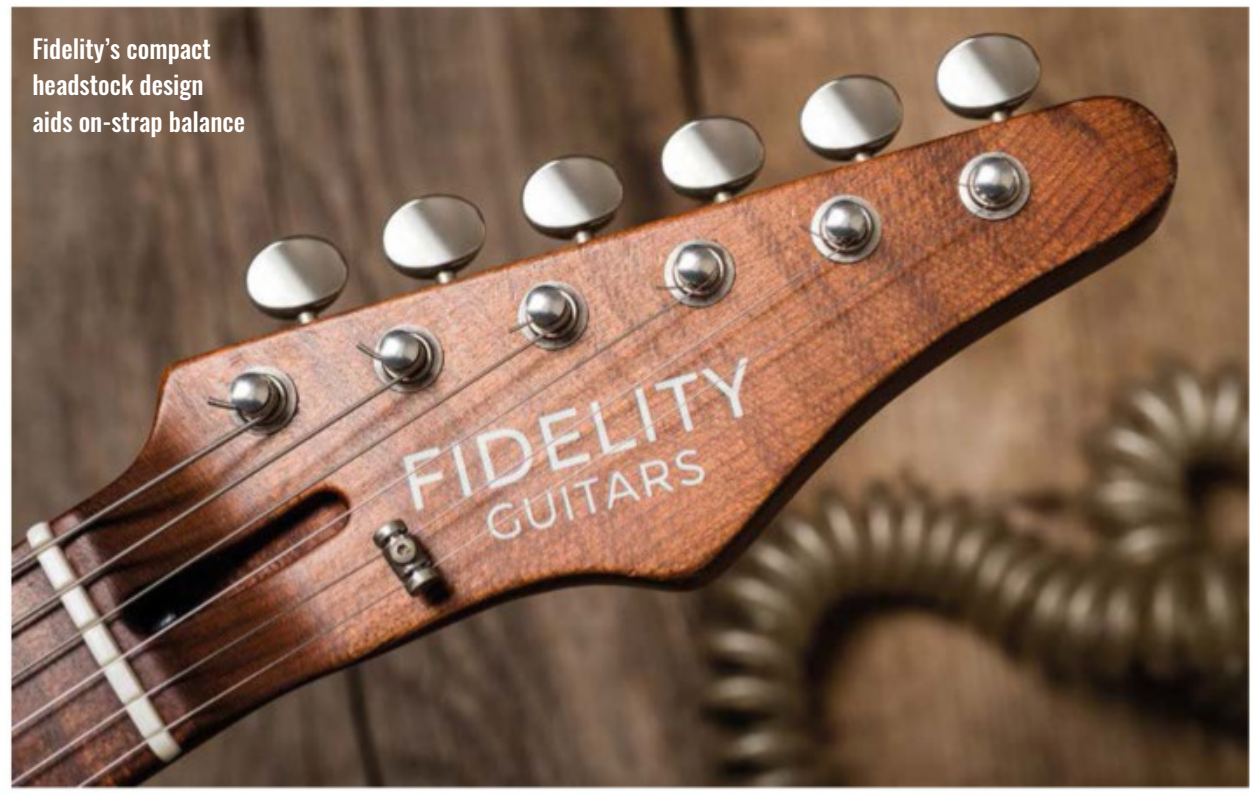
The fret ends and 'board edges have been rounded beautifully for maximum player comfort and we suspect the Stellarosa offers a somewhat smoother playing experience than the old Stella Japonica that inspired it. That said, the neck carve is somewhat unconventional – the stated 'medium C' doesn't have the most uniform taper and actually loses around 0.4mm of depth between the first and third frets before fattening up again around the fourth.

The string spacing of 33.5mm at the nut might be a little tight for some, while the third (G) string slot in the bone nut has been cut slightly wide, with lateral movement from bends causing occasional pings. That said, the combination of a



The Stellarosa has three Mojo Charlie Christian pickups

Our review model has a Gloss Olympic White nitrocellulose finish with medium ageing



Fidelity's compact headstock design aids on-strap balance

The slimline headstock has Gotoh SD91 Magnum Lock tuners

25-inch scale, 0.011-gauge strings and the compound 9.5-14-inch 'board radius balances fight and fluidity all over the neck.

This isn't exactly this writer's first rodeo when it comes to reviewing electric guitars and it's not often we have to consult the manual. However, Fidelity's vintage-style instruction booklet does a fine job of lifting the lid on how the potentially bewildering combination of controls shapes the Stellarosa's sound. The master volume (with treble bleed) and no-load tone controls are self-explanatory, while the two-position toggle switch selects between circuits A and B, with each circuit offering a quartet of tones via individual four-position rotary selectors (the rear pointer knobs).

Circuit A's four settings comprise the bridge pickup in isolation, bridge and neck in series, bridge and neck in parallel or neck alone. Circuit B's settings are bridge alone, bridge and middle in series, bridge and middle in parallel and middle alone. Although there are seven different settings in total, live, we imagine most players will use the two-position toggle to switch between two 'favourite' lead and rhythm or dark and light sounds, as predetermined by the positions of the rotary switches.

IN USE

We quickly get our head around the controls and the Stellarosa excels into a heady brew of light overdrive, hall reverb and tube-style tremolo provided by our RYRA Klone and Strymon Flint, with the attack and clarity of the Mojo Charlie Christian pickups maintaining definition. The tone control works brilliantly, too, introducing a midrange honk when dialled back that growls in a deeply satisfying manner, but doesn't get too swampy when surrounded by ambience and modulation.

With more restrained effects settings and a clean amp tone, there's an awful lot to love. The mixture of deep bass and clear – but not shrill – trebles delivers dreamy 1950s chords and arpeggios, early rockabilly, Spaghetti Western, surf twang and much more.

Specific points of comparison aren't always apparent, but there's a fascinating blend of Fender offset, Rickenbacker and Dynasonic-loaded Gretsch reference points, along with a whole heap of pawnshop flavours, often reminiscent of the catalogue guitars that have found favour over the years with outsiders such as Link Wray and Dan Auerbach.

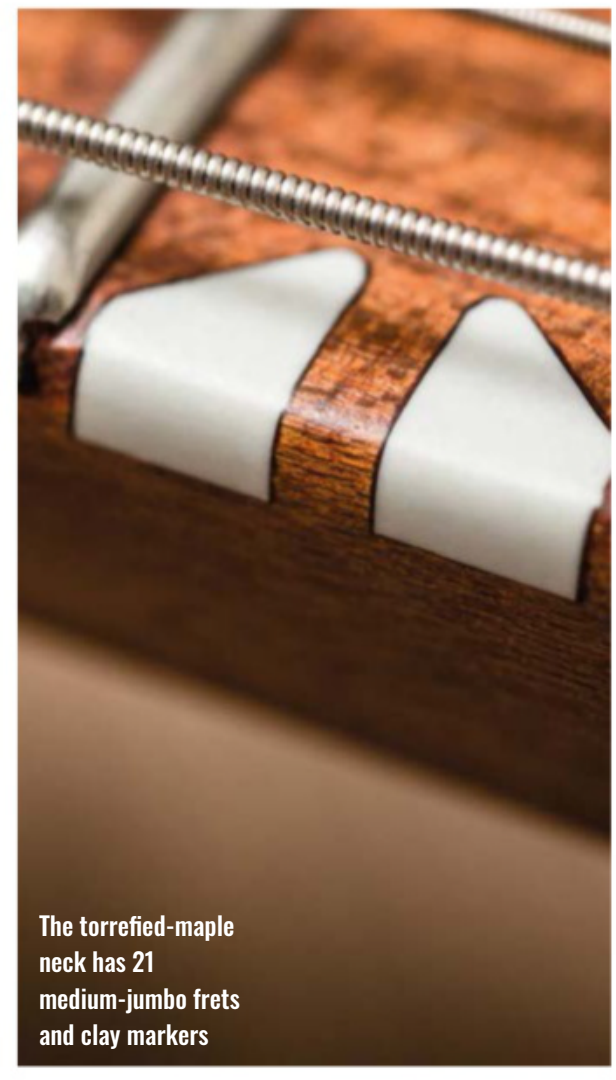
It's almost certainly not the guitar for your average wedding-band gig – and as supplied, the whammy bar doesn't always return to pitch quite as consistently as we'd like – but nevertheless, the Stellarosa could be an instrument that inspires you start a new project or write an album based entirely on the way it sounds and the doors it unlocks.

In a studio or home setting, time spent with the Stellarosa is a voyage of discovery and we can't think of many other review guitars in recent years that have provided quite so much compositional inspiration. With the weak pound pushing the street prices of similarly retro US boutique models into the stratosphere, Fidelity's pricing is competitive, too.

8/10 **Fidelity's individuality is an inspiring breath of fresh air**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Novo Miris J **£4,199**, Fano Standard RB6 **£1,995**, Shelton GalaxyFlite Blaster **£2,999**


The torrefied-maple neck has 21 medium-jumbo frets and clay markers

Guitarist CHOICE

BE PROVOCATEUR

ARTIST: BROWNBEAR

Designed in the UK by Patrick James Eggle
Solid Mahogany Body
Roasted Mahogany Neck
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USA Seymour Duncan Pickups

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DUNABLE CYCLOPS

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

From California maker Dunable comes a one-pickup guitar with, er, two pickups… and a visual banquet of natural timbers. Is this the ultimate high-class rock axe?

If you think 'American boutique' means the place where you get your designer baseball caps, allow Sacha Dunable to set you right. This indie maker is based in southern California, the spiritual home of the electric solidbody guitar, where he crafts mean-looking instruments with the emphasis on quality, playability… and wood. All kinds of wood.

This Cyclops model has a satin-finished three-piece body of black limba and mahogany, a figured walnut top, a mahogany neck with an ebony 'board, a maple pickguard and even maple pickup covers. We can't imagine why Sacha has stuck to boring old plastic for the truss-rod cover. The overall effect is, well, woody… but there's a lot more to this brand than shades of brown.

The essence of boutique building means small-scale craftsmanship, with no corner-cutting on component choices. Perhaps most notably, our test guitar has a pair of the luthier's own Grizzly humbuckers, made with alnico IV magnets and slightly mismatched scatterwound coils. Dunable says these have been specifically designed for his guitars' construction and 25.5-inch scale length – which, when you think about it, is not true of most humbuckers.

Other key features include a trapeze tailpiece, open-backed Grover Sta-Tite tuners with an 18:1 gear ratio, a Tusq nut and a striking pair of skirted control knobs which look like something you'd find on a DIY synth from 1978.

The look of the guitar may divide opinion, especially among those old enough to remember – not necessarily with affection – the Westone Thunder 1-A. That 80s Japanese workhorse doesn't deserve to share a paragraph with this much classier creation, but the superficial resemblance is hard to forget once you've seen it.

That's not the only aesthetic issue: seen from the back, the yellowish limba wings clash somewhat with the russet hue of the mahogany centre section. Luckily, the walnut and maple on the front complement each other nicely, and those pickup inlays look extremely smart. It's just a pity the chunky maple pickguard is a little wobbly-edged around the pickups and at the neck join… all part of the hand-made vibe.

If the specifications here don't suit, contact UK distributor Coda Music, as it's possible to create your own dream machine

The Dunable Grizzly humbuckers have slightly mismatched scatterwound coils

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £2,299 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody double-cutaway guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Black limba and mahogany body with walnut top, mahogany neck, 12" radius ebony fingerboard with 22 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Grover open-back tuners, Schaller tune-o-matic bridge and trapeze tailpiece
ELECTRICS 2x Dunable Grizzly humbuckers, three-way switch, master volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.3mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.6mm at first fret, 22.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.4kg/7.5lb
FINISH Natural only (custom colours available)
LEFT-HANDERS $100 extra
CONTACT Coda Music
coda-music.com, dunableguitars.com

via the numerous custom options on offer. However, the Dunable website quotes a $500 surcharge for custom builds, so if you want this model in metallic orange with block inlays and a Bigsby, you'd better be as well-heeled as you are patient.

Oh, and why is it called the Cyclops? Because it only has one pickup, of course. Although… you're quite right, it hasn't. But it is available in single-pup format, which is how the model was originally conceived.

IN USE

When he's not wrestling with raw slabs of mahogany and walnut, Sacha Dunable is a member of progressive-metal outfit Intronaut. That information might shed some light on some of the design choices here – notably the shallow neck, flattish ebony 'board and fairly high-output pickups. It's a versatile enough guitar, sure, but it feels and sounds most at home with technical rock playing.

Acoustically, the tone is crisp and forthright and even without an amp, we find ourselves playing fast runs up and down that slinky, unlacquered neck. The frets are jumbo, but their ends are neatly dressed and with the low factory action, it never feels like a bumpy ride.

When we do plug in, the power of those pickups is immediately apparent. They're not EMG-style rock monsters – resistance-

The Cyclops' body is black limba and mahogany

The knobs have an almost retro-synth look

wise, we're talking 9k for the bridge and just 7.6k for the neck, measured through a cable – but there's a distinct bias towards strident hi-fi clarity over characterful cluck. So while you will find some chime and twang in bridge and middle positions, clean chords can sound a little 'flooded out' and overly spanky in the upper-mids.

Slam on the overdrive, though, and the beast awakens. The bridge pickup is bright and solid, perfect for hitting those high solo notes with positive precision, while chords have more freshness in the top end than you're ever likely to get from a 24.75-inch Les Paul or SG. Right-hand dampers should watch out for those ringing strings behind the bridge, mind.

The neck humbucker isn't quite as much fun, inevitably, but that's not to say it doesn't have anything to offer. While you'd hardly call it soulful, it's a mighty smooth operator when you want to slow things down; and it still keeps everything supremely tight, with no danger of mushiness.

If mushiness is what you want, or at least a mellowing of the transient spikes, there's a knob for that – but it's not the one you might reach for first. While the tone control doesn't do all that much until it's pushed down below halfway, cutting volume just a touch results in a softer-edged (as well as quieter) sound that's surprisingly appealing.

With a low-wattage amp especially, killing the spiky stuff means the guitar's natural jazzy thump suddenly has room to express itself. Maybe after your mathcore gig. you can take it along to the nearest cocktail bar…

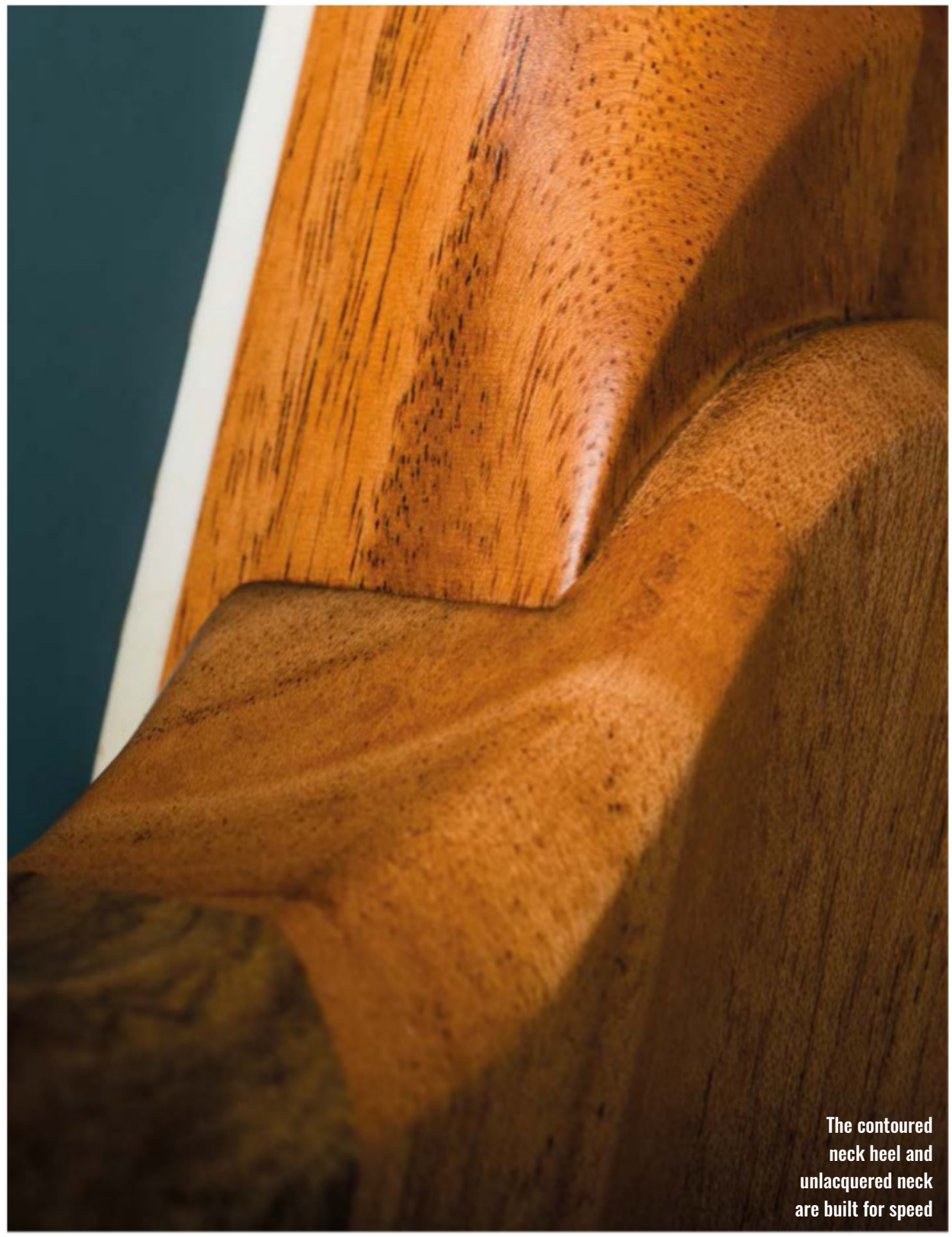
There's little point in comparing the Dunable Cyclops with the usual Fender and Gibson reference points – it's the sort of instrument that can make all your other guitars sound a bit ragged, even though you know they're not really.

But if you've already moved on from the 'classics' in search of the perfect vehicle for your modern, disciplined, mostly high-gain playing, it's about as good a candidate as we've tried. G

9/10 **A sophisticated rock machine that rewards precise and speedy playing**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Lowden GL-10 Koa **£3,599**, Vigier GV Wood **£2,999**, Knaggs Influence Kenai **£2,649**



The contoured neck heel and unlacquered neck are built for speed

The tuners are open-back Grover Sta-Tites

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NIK HUBER
ORCA '59

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Nik Huber's small team of eight builds around 240 guitars every year in a workshop just outside the German city of Frankfurt. When it comes to boutique single-cuts, this is one of the very best…

Although Nik Huber's Orca '59 model has been around for a while, it's newly available via The North American Guitar in London.

On opening this gorgeous single-cutaway electric's smart grey hard case, German luthier Huber's inspiration is clear as day, but there are many refinements that help make this much more than just a slavish Burst tribute.

The Orca's incredible figured top is described as "exceptionally curly maple" and it's difficult to disagree. The three-dimensional, near-holographic nature of the flame is accentuated by the Faded Sunburst and deep dish carve, but it's not all bling; the semi-gloss nitrocellulose finish on the top, aged metal parts and satin open-pore back and neck ensure this Orca feels like it belongs in the wild.

The set mahogany neck features a flame maple-bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard with rich reddish and dark-brown hues. The neck profile is a noticeably deeper palmful than any of the genuine 1959 Les Pauls we've played; yet it's comfortably round-shouldered and upper-fret access is aided by an elegant neck join with a large scoop of wood dressed away from the heel.

The full-thickness body measures approximately 57mm from the back to the apex of the carved top. You might expect the primary ingredient to be mahogany, but this example is hewn from two centre-joined sections of specially ordered lightweight Spanish cedar. Neither Spanish nor a cedar, it's actually a member of the Meliaceae (mahogany) family.

Another point of distinction is provided by the subtle belly contour at the rear. Dig deeper and Huber has added yet more of his own special seasoning to this seemingly familiar recipe: a PRS-style 25-inch scale length is preferred, while the compound fingerboard radius transitions from 10-14 inches and provides a fluid playing surface

The nut is polished bone rather than vintage-style nylon and though the Häussel units are PAF-style humbuckers with nickel covers, pulling up the Orca's neck tone control activates a coil-split on both pickups.

Additional hardware comprises Nik Huber logo'd open-gear Gotoh machineheads with tulip buttons, Schaller strap locks and an ABM tune-o-matic bridge

Huber's shaping for playing comfort includes a heel scoop and a subtle belly contour

The ebony-veneered headstock has Gotoh open-gear machineheads with tulip buttons

and stop tailpiece. We've not always been the biggest fans of 15:1 ratio tuners and sometimes we miss the extra precision and smoother pitch transition of a higher gear ratio, but the Gotohs behave well enough here.

IN USE

An electric guitar's unplugged performance usually provides a strong indication of its amplified character and this beautifully crafted machine doesn't disappoint in either arena. Strummed acoustic chords leap out from a guitar that's alive with top-to-toe resonance but never brash, and there's a long, even decay with swirling harmonics.

It's a similar story when plugged in. Some players find their first encounter with PAF-style pickups disconcerting as they don't expect humbuckers to deliver such brightness, but housed in this Orca '59, the Häussel units deliver plenty of bass and mid-muscle along with clear, complex trebles.

Swapping mahogany for Spanish cedar doesn't seem to have diluted the Orca's essential single-cut character to any significant degree. Add some gain and it's transformed into a soloist's delight, with a ready array of vocal lead tones and killer wails – ranging from cocked-wah nasal to polished-granite smooth. It's an instrument that likes the rough stuff, too, and Texans Grissom and Gibbons would both find plenty to appreciate.

Rather than using the coil-split mode to cop Fender tones, we find the hollow, breezy single-coil voices most useful for acoustic-guitar-style strumming. Roll back the volume a touch and it even does a passable impersonation of a J-160E. Versatile indeed.

9/10 **A significant investment, the Orca combines precision with organic tones and feel**

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £7,250 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION Six-string electric guitar. Made in Germany
BUILD Spanish cedar body with figured maple top. Set mahogany neck with flame maple-bound 10-14" compound-radius Brazilian rosewood fingerboard (CITES certified) with mother of pearl inlays. 22 medium-jumbo frets. Double action (single rod, compressed) truss rod. Ebony headstock veneer, polished bone nut
HARDWARE Gotoh open-gear machineheads with tulip buttons, ABM tune-o-matic bridge and aluminium stop tailpiece, Schaller strap locks
ELECTRICS 2x Häussel 1959 humbucking pickups with aged nickel covers. 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch. Pull neck pickup tone control for coil-split
SCALE LENGTH 25"/635mm
NECK WIDTH 41.6mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.6mm at first fret, 26.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.1mm at nut, 52.2mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.33kg/7.34lb
OPTIONS Contact dealer
FINISH Faded Sunburst semi-gloss nitrocellulose
CONTACT nikhuber-guitars.com, thenorthamericanguitar.com

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS McCarty SC 594 **£3,599**, Patrick James Eggle Macon Singlecut **£4,200**, Gibson Custom 60th Anniversary 1959 Les Paul Standard **£5,199**

DEARNALEY GUITARS
NATURAL & SUNBURST

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cylinder-built acoustics tend to be rare, expensive and mostly associated with contemporary design. But Dave Dearnaley's cylinder builds combine a pre-war aesthetic with recycled old-growth timbers…

Occasionally, we're obliged to begin our reviews with a full disclosure. Regular readers will be familiar with the name of Cardiff-based luthier Dave Dearnaley – he has provided us with help and advice on countless occasions, his Taff Delta T-style electric is the only review guitar this writer has ever bought and he has been a friend for many years.

In addition to being a long-time member of goth-rockers Alien Sex Fiend, Dave is a highly regarded electric-guitar builder with an uncanny ability to capture the tone and vibe of vintage designs. Even so, his most famous guitar is the black V-style model that Phil Campbell played when Motörhead appeared on UK TV comedy *The Young Ones*. It was subsequently purchased by Dave Grohl and you can see it in the Foo Fighters' *Rope* video.

Over the last five years, Dave has phased out the electrics, instead devoting his energies to building acoustic guitars of his own design. Dave would probably feel comfortable with the description 'old school', but his acoustics combine traditional looks with contemporary construction ideas.

His approach to being an acoustic maker is characteristically idiosyncratic. There are no model designations and he will not be accepting commissions. Instead, he plans to always have several guitars available for potential customers to try out. In the worst-case scenario, Dave cheerfully admits "I'll just end up with a house full of really nice acoustics."

You can read Dave's own description of his body design and cylinder construction method in our accompanying interview, but we'd describe the shape as a scaled-up and deepened parlour guitar. The lower bout measures 15 inches across, which puts it in the Auditorium bracket with 000/OM Martins.

For clarity, we'll refer to the review guitars as the Natural and the Sunburst. Both are built with Alpine spruce tops, but the Natural has fiddleback maple back and sides and the Sunburst has East Indian rosewood. The body depths differ, with the Natural and Sunburst measuring 4.875 and 5.25 inches respectively at the lower bout.

Dave's X-brace pattern is specifically tailored for his body shape. Mahogany braces are used for the back, with spruce

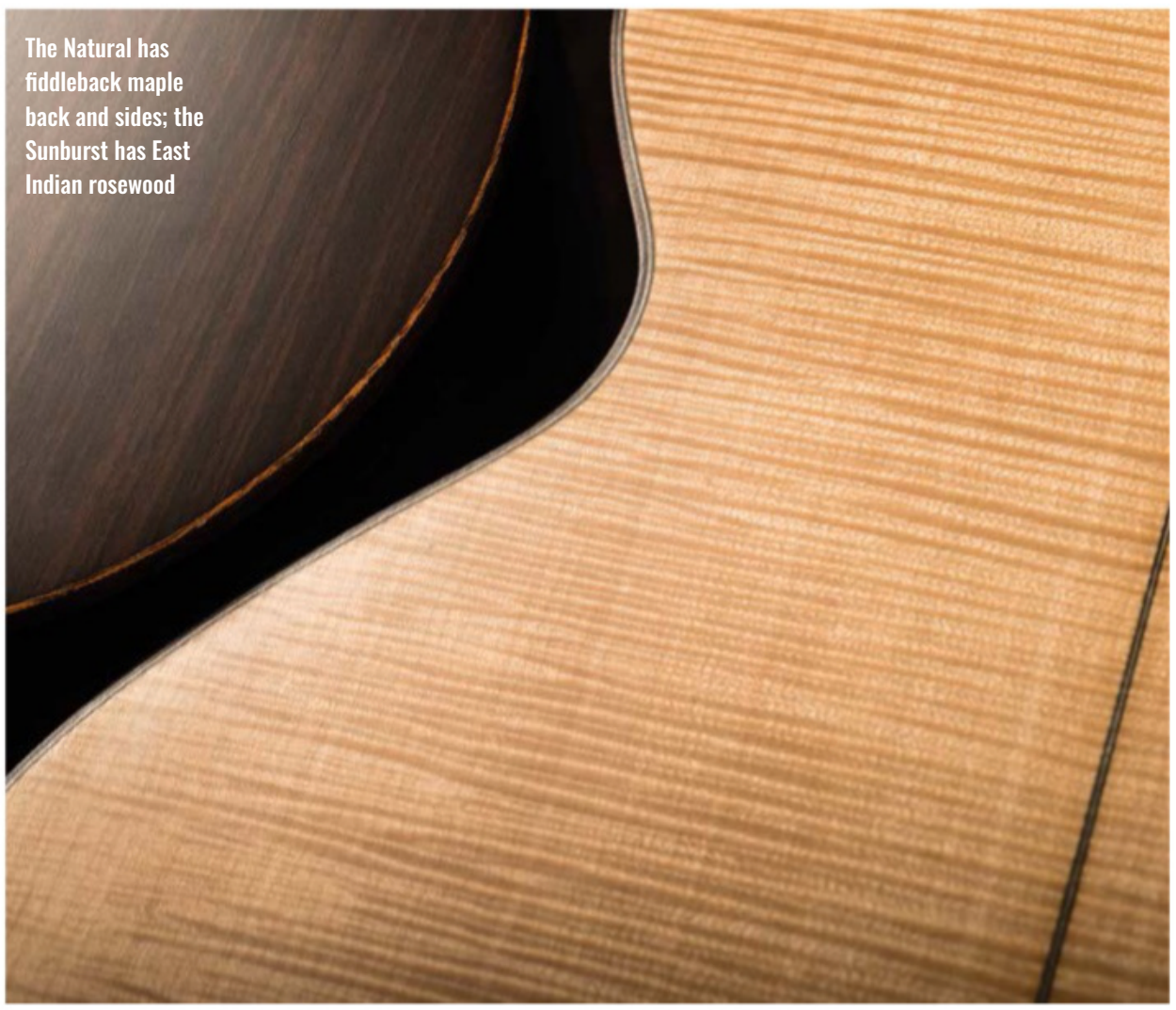
Dearnaley's bridge is designed to keep mass to a minimum while preserving rigidity

braces for the top. The braces are carved to a point to retain stiffness, with fluted sides reducing mass. Finish is applied inside the body for enhanced reflections and brightness.

Both necks are laminated. The Sunburst features three wide strips of Brazilian mahogany sandwiching two maple-veneer layers. The mahogany was sourced from Cardiff University, after many decades of service as writing benches and vanity screens. The Natural's neck is maple sandwiching rosewood veneers.

It's a stable method of construction and since Dave regards two-way truss rods as "the work of the devil", he uses a single-action, vintage-style truss rod. He argues that truss rods should be "homogenous with the wood" and air gaps should be avoided to optimise tone.

The rounded necks possess considerable depth. Dave describes himself as "pretty unrelenting about neck size, because it's all about rigidity, and combining a cylinder-built body with a stiff neck and stiff neck



The Natural has fiddleback maple back and sides; the Sunburst has East Indian rosewood

Dearnaley's neck join is influenced by guitar maker Ervin Somogyi's dowelled-tenon method

Both guitars remain stable when using altered and dropped tunings

joint" results in better sustain. He will, however, make slight alterations to meet customer's requirements. The necks are glued in, but rather than the Martin-style dovetail, Dave prefers Somogyi's dowelled-tenon method.

IN USE

With both guitars newly strung with Elixirs, the family resemblance and tonal contrasts are equally apparent from the first strum. Starting with the similarities, the first thing that strikes us is the extraordinary sustain. It's almost like playing an upright piano with a weight leaning on the sustain pedal.

Then there's the clarity, treble sparkle and a feeling of effortless power. These guitars do not need to be played hard to generate a lot of sound and there's considerable dynamic range to go with the lightning transient response.

The Natural's shallower maple body makes it leaner in the lows than the Sunburst, but it's far from bass-light and could give many rosewood and mahogany OMs a run for their money. The bass is very defined and punchy and this combines with a strong midrange and a high end that's borderline ethereal.

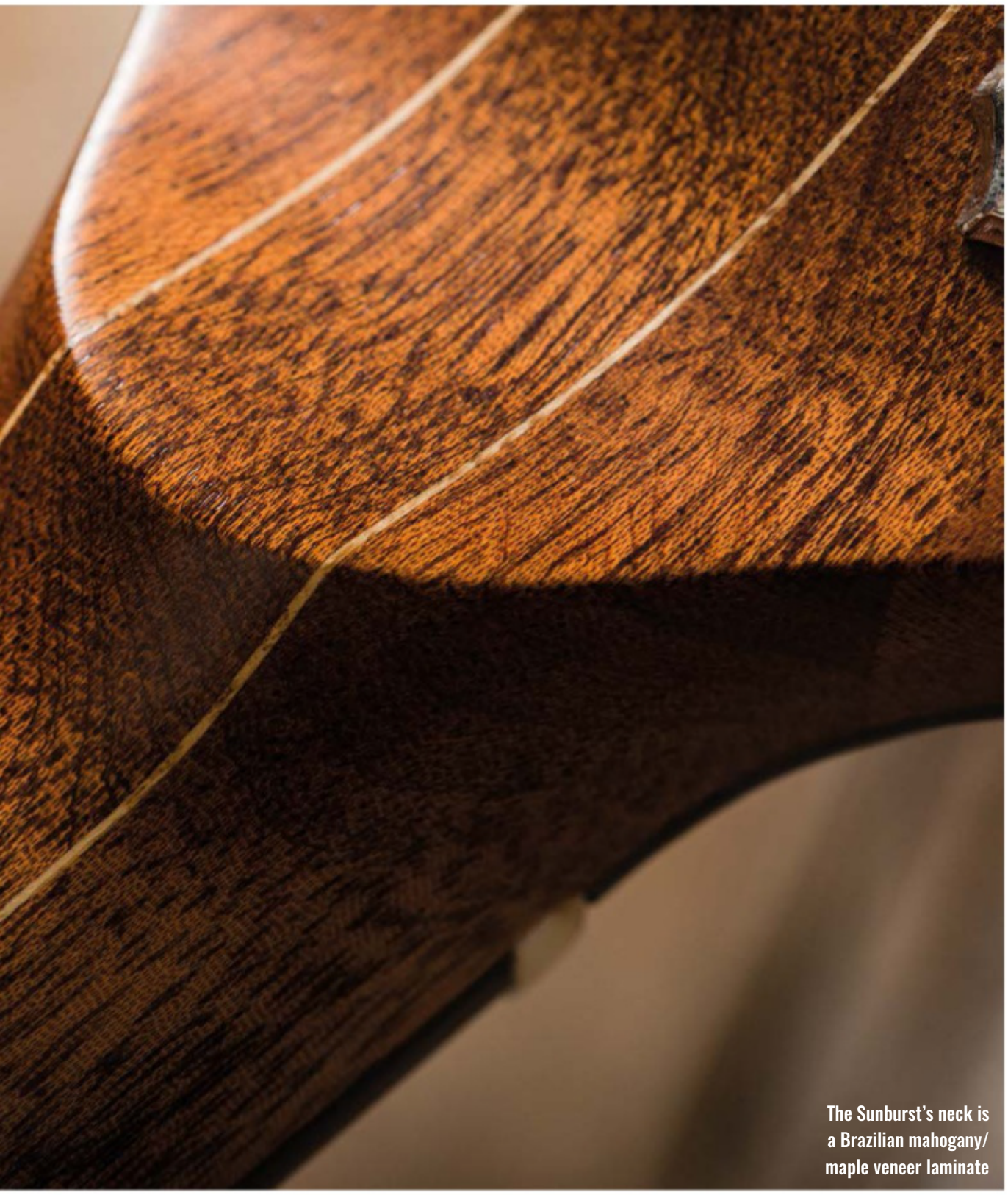
It's every bit a guitar, but there are harp and harpsichord attributes, too. Drop to DADGAD and its credentials as an outstanding fingerstyle instrument cannot be denied. But go to Vestapol or standard tuning and the tone leaves the old country for the New World, as Celtic slides into country blues.

The Sunburst combines subtlety with formidable power and dynamic range. There's ample sparkle, but the treble is somewhat less stratospheric than the Natural's. Instead, single notes have a more rounded and substantial quality that's underpinned with a thunderous bass response that stops suitably short of boominess.

We also hear a touch more of that lingering reverb effect, as harmonics bounce around in the box long after a note has been struck. We don't get quite so much of the pond-hopping vibe from the Sunburst because it feels more sonically rooted in the British Isles. A wonderful all-rounder in standard tuning, the Sunburst also revels in open tunings and almost dares you to keep dropping those low strings. Even with a set of 0.012-gauge strings, a low C retains considerable strength and clarity.

Despite the neck depths, both guitars feel easy to play and, as with mid-50s Gibson necks, the size is soon forgotten. Artfully slotted nuts contribute to smooth tuning, but we find the Gotohs a little imprecise. That said, we notice that these guitars, like V-Class Taylors, don't fluctuate around the pitch when using a strobe tuner.

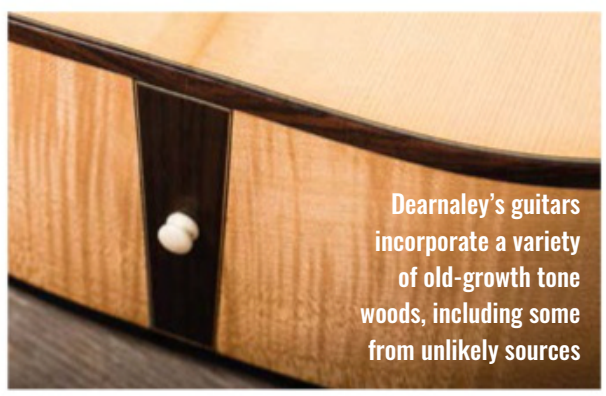
There's some impressive woodworking here but, as ever, Dave's focus is on tone and playability rather than exquisite marquetry and immaculate finishing. They're solidly built – although far from overbuilt – and the odd bead of glue squeeze-out and stray bits of wood inside the body are all part of the quirky charm. Dearnaley acoustics feature exceptional



The Sunburst's neck is a Brazilian mahogany/ maple veneer laminate

The Natural has rosewood binding; the Sunburst's is mahogany

tone woods and have an endearingly artisan vibe. These are not 'guitars as art' and they're not intended to hang on walls to be admired. Instead, they're built to be played and provide decades of sonic intrigue and inspiration. On that score, these guitars are a resounding success. Dave's long-postponed move into acoustic building has been well worth the wait… G



Dearnaley's guitars incorporate a variety of old-growth tone woods, including some from unlikely sources

KEY FEATURES

NATURAL
PRICE £2,500 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION Acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in the UK
BUILD Alpine spruce top with spruce braces, solid 'fiddle back' maple sides and back with mahogany braces, maple/rosewood laminated neck, rosewood bridge and Rio rosewood fingerboard, pearl marker dots, ebony peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, Gotoh 3-on-a-plate tuners, bone bridge pins, nut and compensated saddle, rosewood body binding, Tor-Tis pickguard, single-action truss rod
SCALE LENGTH 636mm/25"
NECK WIDTH 44.6mm at nut, 55.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 26mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.2mm at nut, 58.1mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2kg/4.4lb
ELECTRICS Customer's choice
LEFT HANDERS Yes
FINISH Satin nitrocellulose

9/10 **Effortlessly spans rootsy Americana and ambient Celtic-tinged folk**

KEY FEATURES

SUNBURST
PRICE £2,500 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION Acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in the UK
BUILD Alpine spruce top with spruce braces, solid East Indian rosewood sides and back with mahogany braces, Brazilian mahogany/maple laminated neck, rosewood bridge and Rio rosewood fingerboard, pearl marker dots, ebony peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, Gotoh 3-on-a-plate tuners, bone bridge pins, nut and compensated saddle, mahogany body binding, celluloid pickguard, single-action truss rod
SCALE LENGTH 636mm/25"
NECK WIDTH 45.5mm at nut, 54.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 26mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 38.6mm at nut, 57.2mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2kg/4.4lb
ELECTRICS Customer's choice
LEFT HANDERS Yes
FINISH Satin nitrocellulose
CONTACT Dearnaley Guitars facebook.com/dave.dearnaley

9/10 **Dreadnought bass power with refined treble and huge dynamic range**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Taran Tirga Mhor **£6,500** (base model), Stefan Sobell New World **£8,000**, NK Forster Model S-HO **£4,500**

GOING ACOUSTIC

We catch up with Dave to find out more about his voyage into the acoustic world…

Why did you switch to building acoustics?
"It was probably because I'd spent so long building electrics, but it was always the plan. I bought a load of timber sets many years ago, not that I had any use for it at the time – and I just put them into storage until five years ago, when I built the first one.

"I was almost shamed into it by a customer who built a couple of acoustic kits. I'd given him advice and he knew about my timber stash. He's an engineer and as a thank you, he made me a side-bending jig. That was the beginning, although I did make an acoustic when I first started doing repairs around 1978. I bent the sides in the bath and built it on the kitchen table. I used it for years, but young children and damp farmhouses eventually did for it. I still have the carcass in my workshop."

Your acoustic designs are very much your own…
"After years of building electric replicas, I felt I had to do something that's mine. The shape came from a ladder-braced German clunker that I'd had since the 80s. It wasn't worth restoring, but I always found its shape particularly appealing.

"I do like the spookiness of ladder bracing, but it's too limiting, so I decided to formulate an X-brace design to fit that shape. After building four, the next thing was to adapt the design for a 14th-fret neck join. I drew a new layout and, by happy accident, the numbers just fell right. The bridge is exactly halfway between the end block and the lateral brace, so it's slap in the middle of the vibrational plate."

Which other builders inspire you?
"Somebody turned me onto Ervin Somogyi and I read his book. There's a lot of science and rigour in it and it pointed out some things that I'd not previously considered that are important. A lot of Somogyi's ideas reinforced what I felt instinctively, but I don't hold with the 'guitars as art' thing.

"Then I started looking at some of the British makers, in particular Stefan Sobell, because I've always been a fan and I own one of his guitars. His approach is completely different to Somogyi's and I found myself wondering who's right? I suppose I've ended up using elements of both, but all of my stuff is a work in progress."

How are the guitars constructed?
"My tops and backs are cylinder built, on a 20-foot radius. With top thicknesses, I don't work to a number, because every piece of wood is different. It's more about feeling it than listening to it. Spruce cut on the quarter is pretty floppy, laterally, so it will almost sag into a cylinder. I fit the braces to that curve, so although the tops look stressed, I'm building them with as little stress as possible.

"The sides are sanded using the cylinder to meet the curvature of the tops, so everything fits together like an Airfix kit. Once I've established the lowest points, I rock the rims lengthways as I'm sanding to introduce little angles at the front and back. So, it's almost like a dish build, but with the emphasis on the lateral rather than the longitudinal.

"The spruce I'm using for the braces is ancient and it was salvaged from the rafters of Oriel College in Oxford. It's about 300 years old and it's extremely light, but really stiff. Most of the timber I'm using for the bodies I've had since 1974, so it's very stable."

What's the thinking behind your bridge design?
"It's structural engineering, really. You can compare its function to a roof truss or I-beam. I like pyramid bridges, but then I gleaned from Somogyi that the ends, beyond the scoops each side of the centre section, tend to flap about as the top is vibrating.

"Sobell considers the bridge the most important brace, but I'm not so keen on his spatula design. My bridge is intended to work like a spatula bridge, but have a more traditional look. It's all about losing mass but keeping rigidity."

You're not into decorative flourishes, but there are no compromises on the build…
"If you're going to make a guitar by hand, why would you employ cost-cutting measures? The steel-string guitar was designed for mass production, but since the late 60s, people have got into hand-building what is essentially a factory instrument. Why would I stack the heel or scarf the headstock to save timber? If I'm asking a premium price, I want to be making a premium product."

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WALRUS AUDIO KANGRA

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

This Himalayan-themed fuzz and filter pedal designed with *Saturday Night Live* guitarist Jared Scharff takes Walrus into wild sonic territory

The hottest trend in distortion pedals seems to be scuzz – hip guitar-slingers can't get enough of the spitty, scratchy sound of lo-fi fuzz. Which is cool, but it does make us feel bad for all the designers who've put so much time and effort into ensuring their stompboxes don't sound like misfiring tugboats.

Walrus Audio's new combined octave fuzz and filter pedal, the Kangra, is most definitely a scuzzer. Designed in collaboration with Jared Scharff from the *Saturday Night Live* house band, it's inspired by his own Kay Fuzz Tone – a cheapo unit from the late 60s that is more of a curio than a classic. But this is much more than just a retro remake.

Instead of the original's wah-style tone treadle we get a more versatile low-pass filter, plus a couple of intriguing toggle switches. One of these engages a boost to the mids, while the other flips between 'vintage' and 'modern' fuzz voicings.

Nope, there's no gain knob – the other controls are all for the filter. Three dials shape its frequency response, while another toggle switch engages envelope-following mode (where the filter tracks your playing dynamics). If you're missing that treadle, you can also use an expression pedal to move the cut-off frequency up and down.

The Kangra Valley in India is a place with some significance to Scharff and is represented by the pedal's artwork. "It was this tranquil and peaceful valley, but if you look up ahead, the heaviness of the Himalayas was right there. It represents the duality of the pedal," he says.

IN USE

Two effects in one compact pedal means two footswitches very close together. We'll tackle the fuzz on its own first, because it's the star of the show here. Yes, it's splatty and pinched and doesn't get on so well with low-output pickups; plus you can only really hear the upper octave above the 10th fret. But if you accept those limitations, you're free to enjoy a ripping fuzz that's equally tasty in all four distinct flavours.

The mid switch selects between chunky and scooped, while flipping between vintage and modern has a dramatic effect on low-end heft, dynamic response and overall 'bigness'. It's all quite addictive – and while there's clearly gating at work, it's not the sort that'll cut you off in mid-screech.

Engaging the filter in fixed mode adds a whole new dimension of evil and you might

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £179
DESCRIPTION Octave fuzz and filter pedal. Made in USA
CONTROLS Sensitivity, resonance, frequency, envelope on/off; volume, mid boost switch, modern/vintage switch; filter and fuzz bypass footswitches
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 126 x 70 x 57mm
CONTACT FACE face.be, walrusaudio.com

find this more rewarding than the envelope-following option… which sounds fine but demands careful knob management to keep things musical. In some ways, the envelope effect sounds better with the fuzz switched off, giving it a much bigger dynamic range to track for those rhythmic auto-wah effects. Really, though, it's all about the fuzz. And when scruffy can sound this inspiring, who needs neat and tidy? G

9/10 **Lo-fi fuzz at its most seductive, with or without the filter**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Black Cat Monster K-Fuzz **£205**, Seymour Duncan Fooz **£339**, Teisco Fuzz **£149**

Versatile filter and fuzz effects combine in one compact stompbox

SNAKE OIL FINE INSTRUMENTS

MARVELLOUS ENGINE & THE VERY THING

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Gather round, ladies and gentlemen, for the very latest in distortion and overdrive… but do Snake Oil's tone-curing elixirs really work?

You probably know Rob Chapman as the bearded shredder in all those Andertons YouTube videos, or possibly as the man behind Chapman Guitars. Well now, thanks to a collaboration with Mythos Pedals founder Zach Broyles, he's also a stompbox peddler.

It's hard to dislike the playful branding of Snake Oil Fine Instruments, harking back to the florid product marketing of the 19th century – long before the Advertising Standards Authority spoiled everyone's fun by telling them not to make stuff up. Luckily, once you've had a titter over all the daft words, you're left with a pair of pedals that actually look extremely smart… and ought to sound pretty tasty as well.

Zach Broyles knows his way around a circuit diagram, and these pedals are built in the UK – thus the reasonable but hardly giveaway pricing. The build quality's certainly good, although that fruity verbiage could've done with a spell-check: most of it's in British English but 'vigor' is the American spelling… and 'reknown' isn't a word in any language. Tsk.

IN USE

Chapman's guitars are not designed for cruise-ship lounge jazz – they're mostly full-on rockers – and so we shouldn't be surprised to find that these pedals are big on shredability and low on subtlety.

Both have self-explanatory controls for volume, gain and tone, but we're drawn to the Marvellous Engine first because of its intriguing fourth knob, marked 'voice'. This allows you to dial in a second clipping stage, adding a whole lot of extra sting to a tone that's already as fiery as a Twitter debate about Brexit.

Taking the immortal ProCo RAT as a reference point, Snake Oil's coppery contraption offers the same kind of smooth saturation; and while its frequency response is more 'full range' than the RAT's, there's a similar focus on choppy mids that makes this a great pedal for old-school rock and metal riffing. There are usable sounds all the way up the tone control, but it never gets truly zingy… until we crank that voice knob, which adds as much presence as it does distortion.

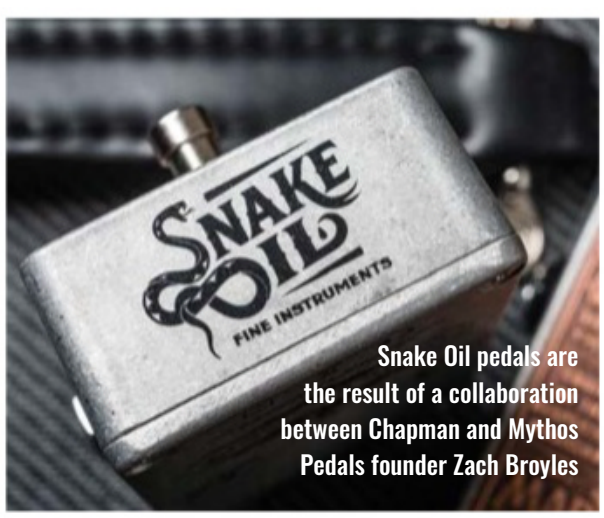
The overdrive pedal isn't quite so gainy and this is a far more 'natural' effect in

The pedal designs have a playful Medicine Show aesthetic

terms of dynamics. Again, the important stuff is happening in the midrange, but this time there's bags of treble on tap – in fact, our advice is to start with the tone fully off and treat it as an optional top boost.

It sounds good going into a clean amp, but better into an already crunchy one, and works brilliantly in tandem with the Marvellous Engine as a thickener for solos.

There's no great innovation going on here, but both pedals do their job with style and flexibility.



Snake Oil pedals are the result of a collaboration between Chapman and Mythos Pedals founder Zach Broyles

KEY FEATURES

MARVELLOUS ENGINE
PRICE £149
DESCRIPTION Distortion pedal. Made in UK
CONTROLS Gain, volume, voice, tone
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 110 x 54 x 50mm

8/10 **A tweakable distortion pedal that sounds more serious than it looks**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

ProCo RAT 2 **£65**, Boss ST-2 Power Stack **£97**, Stone Deaf Trashy Blonde **£117**

KEY FEATURES

THE VERY THING
PRICE £149
DESCRIPTION Overdrive pedal. Made in UK
CONTROLS Gain, volume, tone
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 110 x 54 x 50mm
CONTACT Chapman Guitars chapmanguitars.co.uk

8/10 **For incisive solo boosts, this might indeed be the very thing**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

EarthQuaker Devices Plumes **£105**, Way Huge Supa-Lead **£139**, Fulltone PlimSoul **£149**

BLACKSTAR
AMPLUG2 FLY GUITAR & BASS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Blackstar brings its small-amp knowhow to the popular amPlug range of pocket-sized and affordable on-the-go tone gadgets – could these be the best headphone amps on the planet?

Corporate synergy can be a wonderful thing – it's the reason why we can have Oreo bits in our Dairy Milk bars and Spider-Man is in our Avengers movies. And now it's also enabled Blackstar to put its sonic signature on Korg's ultra-compact amPlug headphone amps.

Since their 2007 launch, the amPlugs have been something of an incongruous hit for Vox and its parent company, Korg. In a world where everyone has a full amp and effects rig on their mobile phone, why do you need a small plastic doohickey with one amp sound and a few basic effects?

Well… how many of us waste our evenings scrolling through Netflix because we can't decide what to watch? For time-poor players who just want to get on with it, amPlugs are a compelling alternative to the option-paralysis of modern amp and effects software – especially when they make such a good fist of emulating that classic Vox tone.

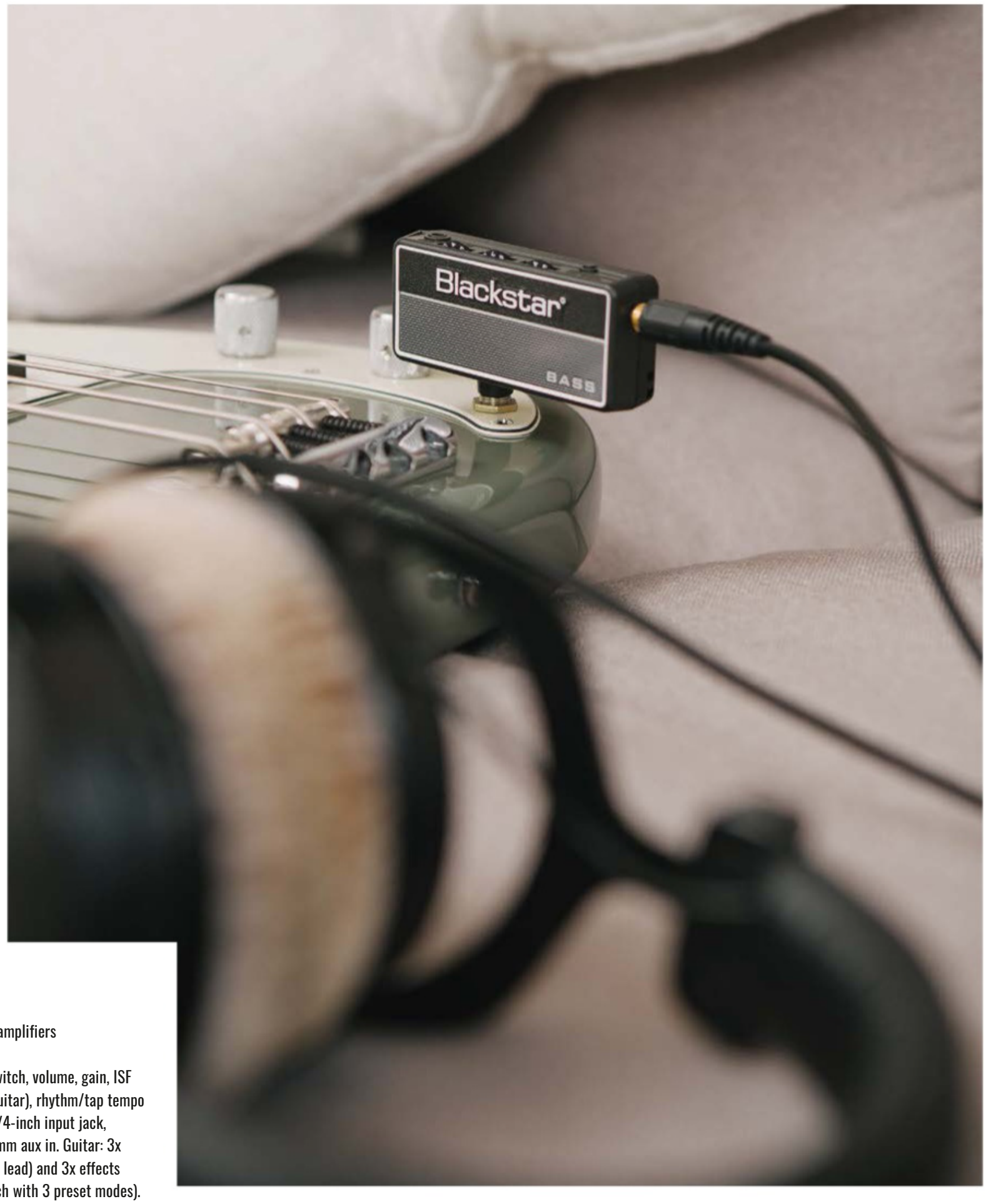
What the amPlugs haven't always been best at, however, are non-Vox sounds – and that's where Blackstar comes in. The original Fly is the most 'big' sounding practice amp on the planet and so the prospect of Blackstar cramming similar tonal qualities into units for guitar and bass that are even more portable and affordable is seriously enticing.

If you've used an amPlug before, you'll know the deal – a plastic box around half the size of a pack of cigarettes, with a quarter-inch plug that rotates to accommodate various jack-socket configurations. On top of the guitar version, we have three rotary controls for gain, volume and Blackstar's ISF mid-shaping, plus 3.5mm jacks for headphones and an aux in and push buttons for power and to scroll through the three different onboard effects (delay, reverb and chorus), each of which has three modes.

On the bass side, it's the same, except a classic tone control replaces ISF and the effects are swapped for six tap-tempo rhythm loops to jam along with.

IN USE

First off, we plug in to our trusty classic Fly's headphone out and A/B it with the sound of the amPlug Fly Guitar, and there's no doubt that the amPlug has the beating of its big brother. Particularly with clean sounds, there's a warmth and depth to the



KEY FEATURES

PRICE £42 each
DESCRIPTION Headphone amplifiers for guitar and bass
CONTROLS Power/mode switch, volume, gain, ISF (Guitar), tone (Bass), FX (Guitar), rhythm/tap tempo
FEATURES Both: rotating 1/4-inch input jack, 3.5mm headphone out, 3.5mm aux in. Guitar: 3x amp models (clean, crunch, lead) and 3x effects (reverb, delay, chorus – each with 3 preset modes). Bass: 3x amp models (classic, modern, overdrive) and 6x rhythm loops with tap tempo.
POWER 2x AAA batteries (up to 11 hours use, auto-shutoff after 30 minutes of no signal)
SPEAKER N/A
DIMENSIONS 86 x 38 x 31mm
WEIGHT 40g/0.08lb
CONTACT Blackstar
blackstaramps.com

amPlug's tones that the Fly can't match – especially when adding a bit of spacey delay or reverb into the mix, it really does offer that same 3D feel of the original Fly, but through a pair of headphones.

A common complaint about the Vox amPlugs was centred around what happens when you turn up the wick, and here Blackstar's high-gain experience really pays off.

Whether it's crunchy overdrive or full-on lead, with careful setting of the ISF control you can get thick, powerful distorted sounds that outstrip the rather abrasive tones often associated with Vox amPlugs.

The Bass model is equally usable. The three modes – classic, modern and overdrive – all do exactly what you'd want (the overdrive is particularly fun), while six varied rhythm patterns offer everything from rock and funk to a simple metronome. Having to select the pattern and the tap tempo using long/short clicks on the same button is a bit fiddly at first, but you get the hang of it.

The amPlug concept has always been about offering all the sounds you'd need for a quick headphone practice or jam-along session with minimal hassle, but the injection of Blackstar's knowhow has kicked it up to another level.

In all the ways that matter, these amPlug2 Flys feel like a great leap forward for headphone amps.

9/10 **Adds Blackstar's small-amp wizardry to what was already a fun product**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vox amPlug2 AC30 **£25.99**, Electro-Harmonix Headphone Amp **£42**, Nux GP-1 **£9.95**

100
1

WINDING WHEELS

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOE SUPPLE

Rotosound chairman Jason How shows us around the string company's factory in Sevenoaks and talks about the past, present and future of this venerable British brand

Based in Sevenoaks in Kent in the south-east of England, Rotosound's heritage may stretch back to the late 1950s, but the company definitely isn't resting on its laurels. With a new range of Ultramag electric-guitar strings the brand's big push for 2019, it seems like the perfect time to head to Rotosound HQ and sit down with Jason How. Jason is company chairman, engineer extraordinaire, and son of Rotosound founder James How, who sadly passed away in 1994.

"I'm a bit like my dad, in a way," Jason reflects. "My dad was an engineer and a musician, so that's what brought him into the string business, because he played the

Rotosound chairman Jason How designed and built many of the string-winding machines at the factory himself

zither and the violin. He couldn't get strings for the zither, and he was working at the Royal Ordnance Factory in Woolwich. This was 1955. And he decided to get materials and start making strings."

Rotosound's impressive archive includes letters that document How Snr's initial pursuit of materials for string-making.

"I can trace the history back," says Jason. "When the company first started, it was excitingly called Top Strings! Then it became Rotop. Then in about 1963, Rotosound. My dad did the logo, it's a pretty timeless design, really. I've got all his notes on all the different strings. There's all the spec."

The corridor outside Jason's office features numerous framed prints of legendary Rotosound artists – it's almost a 'Who's Who' of late-1960s rock royalty, including The Jimi Hendrix Experience, The Move, Pink Floyd and indeed, John Entwistle from The Who. "Back in the 60s, the south east was the place to be," says Jason, "if you were near London. You had all

the bands recording in London and you had Hendrix over here."

Jason shows us around the factory downstairs, where many of the string-winding machines whirring away were designed and built by the Rotosound chairman himself. It's something of a unique story in the industry, with Jason's engineering ingenuity and years of hard work back in the 1990s allowing the company not only to continue manufacturing in the UK, but also to increase production and become the global force it is today.

Ultramag strings use a 52 per cent nickel, 48 per cent iron alloy for the wrap wire

SOUND THINKING

When he's not writing his own politicised take on psychedelic pop music (jasonhow.com), innovation and refinement on the factory floor are never far from Jason's mind. Ultramag strings sit at a premium price-point that's uncharted territory for Rotosound electric-guitar sets, so it was vital they brought something new to the table.

The Type 52 alloy used for the wrap wire is claimed to offer more power, volume and sustain thanks to higher magnetic content, plus low friction and corrosion-resistant properties. "Normally, a set of regular electric strings – ours, D'Addario, Ernie Ball – would be eight per cent nickel," Jason explains.

"These are 52 per cent nickel. 48 per cent iron. They are a much louder string, but it is an expensive material. I've had some great feedback on them from really good players who have tried them and like them. We had a good response at the NAMM show. They do last a bit longer, but they're not coated."

Although How doesn't rule out Rotosound producing a coated electric-guitar string in the future, for now, he feels that coated strings still lack a little high-end zing compared to uncoated sets.

Our conversation takes in such topics as analogue recording, fuzz pedals, Jason's love of Billy Childish, jamming on Beatles songs with metal musicians at the Whisky A Go Go and plenty more besides. As Jason notes, sometimes it's easy to forget the reason we all do this: "It's all about the music, it's important, it's what we're in it for," he affirms. Ain't that the truth.

Visit rotosound.com for more info and read our review of the new Ultramag strings over the page

ROTOSOUND
ULTRAMAG ELECTRIC GUITAR STRINGS

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Need more magnetism from your electric strings? Rotosound has you covered with its new Ultramag range…

Established in 1958, UK string brand Rotosound is responsible for defining some of the greatest guitar and bass tones ever committed to tape, from Hendrix to The Who, Guns N' Roses to Florence And The Machine.

Rotosound's strength lies in the fact that everything is manufactured in-house, often on proprietary machinery, and the new Ultramag range of Type 52 Alloy (52 per cent nickel) electric-guitar strings is no exception, with computer-controlled winding and tension control playing a vital role. For the purpose of this review, we're testing two sets, in gauges 0.010 and 0.011 (0.009 is also available), on an instrument that had previously been strung with another brand's coated strings.

Feeling a little sadistic, we select a Bigbsy-equipped guitar to fully explore Rotosound's claims of low friction, balanced tension and tuning stability.

IN USE

Rotosound's secret new recipe for the Ultramag range results in higher magnetic content in each string with, one might hope, a resulting surge of power, mystery and the hammer of the gods. The Ultramags feel good in both gauges and 'bed in' quickly and easily, with only a couple of full stretches along the fretboard.

Recording our guitar prior to and after restringing, we are impressed with the clarity and warmth we hear. There is a subtle rise in volume and the quality of the sound is very good indeed. Even after a couple of hours' play, both sets retain much of their initial tone and despite some gratuitous Bigsby use, tuning stability is good. Strong work!

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £14.95 per set
TYPE Electric guitar strings. Made in UK
CONTACT Rotosound rotosound.com

8/10 **A modern take on classic tone from a company that was there from the start**

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PRS Standard Singlecut Soapbar - used/2007 - vintage cherry £1,290
PRS Custom 24 Artist Pack - used/2002 - amber £2,190
PRS Hollowbody 11 Artist Pack + piezo - used/2008 ..... £3,850
PRS Singlecut SC245 Artist Pack - used/2008 - black cherry..... £2,890

SELECT FENDER CUSTOM SHOP

Custom Shop '64' Journeyman Relic Strat - faded sunburst £3,299
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Custom Shop '64' Journeyman Relic Strat - aged olympic white £3,299
Custom Shop '64' Journeyman Relic Strat - faded fiesta red..... £3,299
Custom Shop 65 Heavy Relic Strat - olympic white..... £3,299
Custom Shop 65 Heavy Relic Strat - lake placid blue £3,299
Custom Shop Limited Edition 52 NOS Tele - blonde £2,790
Custom Shop Cabronita Relic - ice blue metallic..... £3,690
Custom Shop 63 Heavy Relic Tele - faded sea foam green..... £3,299
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Epiphone Olympic - circa1965 - faded cherry £1,390
Fano Alt De Facto MG6 - used/2012 - aged sonic blue..... £1,849
Fender 1973 Tele Thinline - natural £4,389
Fender 1978 Tele - sienna sunburst £1,849
Fender 69 Blue Flower Tele - Made in Japan - Used/2014 ..... £790
Fender AM Deluxe Strat HSS - teal green - used/2002 ..... £990
Fender AM HSS Strat - black - used/2003 ..... £790
Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat - fiesta red..... £2,699
Fender Custom Shop 62 Journeyman Relic Strat - olympic white..... £2,699
Fender Custom Shop Limited Edition Thinline Tele - Blue Flower..... £3,289
Fender Custom Shop Tomatillo Journeyman Relic Strat..... £3,499
Fender James Burton Tele - Red Paisley Flame - used/2015 ..... £1,379
Fender Stevie Ray Vaughan Signature Strat - circa 1999..... £1,299
Fender Tele Custom - black - circa 1974..... £2,775
Fender USA Strat Plus Deluxe - black - used/1993..... £1,090
Gibson Custom Shop 1961 ES335 Dot - historic burst - used/2018..... £3,290
Gibson ES150DCN - used/1968 ..... £3,490
Gibson ES335TD - tobacco sunburst - used/1981..... £2,579
Gibson ES339 Studio - used/2015 - wine red £939
Gibson Historic Collection R9 Les Paul - used/2005 ..... £3,579
Gibson Les Paul Classic - black - used/2002..... £1,359
Gibson Les Paul Classic Soapbar - black - used/2018..... £1,469
Gibson Les Paul Custom - wine red - used/1976 ..... £3,099
Gibson Les Paul Deluxe - cherry sunburst - used/1981 ..... £2,190
Gibson Les Paul Junior - used/2005 - vintage sunburst £689
Gibson Les Paul Limited Edition - midnight manhattan blue - 2004 ..... £1,849
Gibson Les Paul Standard DC - amber - used/2002 ..... £1,449
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Gretsch 6122S Country Classic 1 - used/1989..... £1,890
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PRS Custom 24 '10' Top - used/2013 - fire red burst £2,290
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PRS SC250 Singlecut - '10' Top - natural - used/2008..... £1,690
Rickenbacker 330 - mapleglo - used/1988 ..... £1,339
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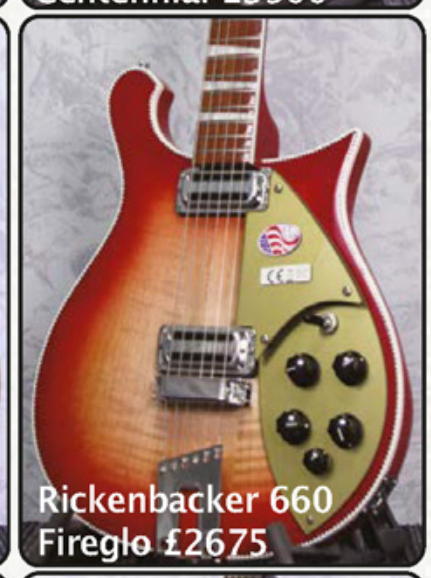
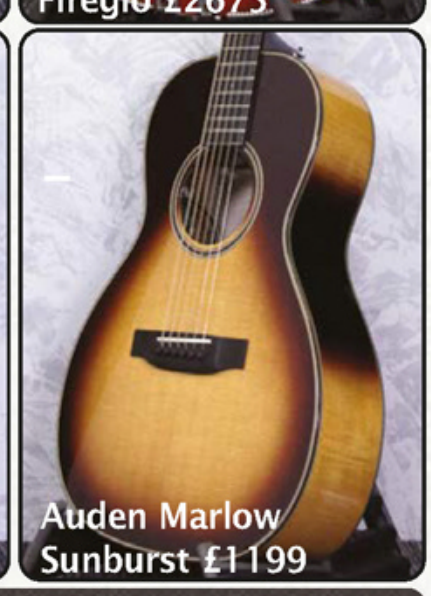
Highlights Of The Month





ACOUSTICS

Main dealer for Lowden, Atkin, Brook, Moon, Patrick James Eggle, Martin, Faith, Auden, Seagull, Fender, Eastman, Aria, Crafter, Maton, Furch, Tanglewood

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Featured

Gibson 2013 Gary Moore Les Paul Standard

Pre-owned
£2,499

The Gibson Gary Moore Les Paul needs no introduction. Gary Moore is a guitar legend, and his signature range of Les Pauls are also becoming legendary as well. Made in 2013 this Les Paul features a Mahogany Body with a figured Flame Maple Top. The flame is truely stunning, one of the best we have seen! Teamed with a 50s style mahogany neck, with Granadillo fingerboard, The Trapezoid inlays set the fingerboard off nicely, a classic design! Unique to the Gary Moore Les Paul is the lack of binding. It is believed they decided to do this in a bid to make the guitar more affordable! The dual Burstbucker Pro Humbucking pickups give the guitar all the power it needs. With Alnico V magnets and wound with 42 AWG wire, these pickups really sing! Although secondhand this Les Paul is in fantastic condition. There are only 2 very small marks on the back of the headstock. See photos above. Other then that it is perfect! Included is also the original Gibson Hard Case with the Gary Moore Signature printed on it, and the original Document and Strap Locks.

Recent arrivals..

Rickenbacker 4003 (Midnight Blue)

Brand New. A classic Ricki Design. 20 Frets. Rosewood fingerboard. Maple Body with through neck. Includes Hard Case.

Fender Jaco Pastorius Jazz Bass

Fretless bass. Signature Model. American Vintage Pickups. C Shape Neck. Nitrocellulose Sunburst finish. Includes Hard Case.

G&L USA JB-2

Made in the USA. Finished in 3 Tone Sunburst. Satin Finish Neck. Excellent condition. Includes original Hard Case.

Fender FSR Ltd Ed 70s P Bass

Full Figured Ash Body. Limited Edition. Maple Neck. '70s C Profile. Period Correct Appointments. Includes Padded Gig Bag.

Fender American Dlx Ash Telecaster

Circa 2010. One piece Ash Body. N3 Noiseless Pickups. Maple Neck. Locking Tuners. Good Condition. Original Hard Case.

Fender American Pro Stratocaster HH

Finished in Black. Dual Humbucking Shawbucker Pickups. Deep C Neck. 22 Narrow Tall Frets. Treble Bleed. Inc Elite Hard Case.

Fender American Pro Stratocaster

Finished in Candy Apple Red. Rosewood Fingerboard. Three Single Coil Pickups Tim Shaw Pickups. Inc Elite Hard Case.

Fender MIJ Traditional '60s Jazzmaster

Finished in Pink Paisley. Made in Japan. Rosewood Fingerboard. Alder Body. Dual Single Coil Pickups. Includes Padded Gig Bag.

Gibson 2016 SJ-200 Vintage

SJ22VNGH1. Thermally Aged Adirondack Red Spruce Top. Maple B&S. Rosewood fingerboard. LR Baggs Pickup. Hard Case & Docs.

Gibson 2011 Dove

Sitka Spruce Top. Maple Back & Sides with Flame. 3 Piece Maple Neck. Nitrocellulose finish. Includes original Gibson Hard Case.

Hofner Verythin Special DC (HVSP-DC)

Circa 2012. Hand finished in Germany. Spruce Top. Flame Maple Back & Sides. Ebony Fingerboard. Diamond Pickups. Hard Case.

Hofner 456 / 457 Archtop

Circa 1960-62. Three Pickups (recently rewound). Believed to be all original. Great condition for its age.

Taylor 814CE Grand Auditorium

Circa 2011. Made in El Cajon, USA. Rare Sunburst Finish. Spruce Top. Rosewood Back & Sides. Expression Pickup. Hard Case & Docs.

Taylor 412e Grand Concert

Solid Sitka Spruce Top. Solid Ovangkol Back & Sides. Built in Taylor Expression 2 Pickup System. With Original Hard Case and Docs.

Taylor 524e Grand Auditorium

All Mahogany. Built in Expression 2 Pickup System. Made from Tropical Mahogany. Ebony Fingerboard. Original hardcase & docs.

Martin USA GPCPA1 Plus

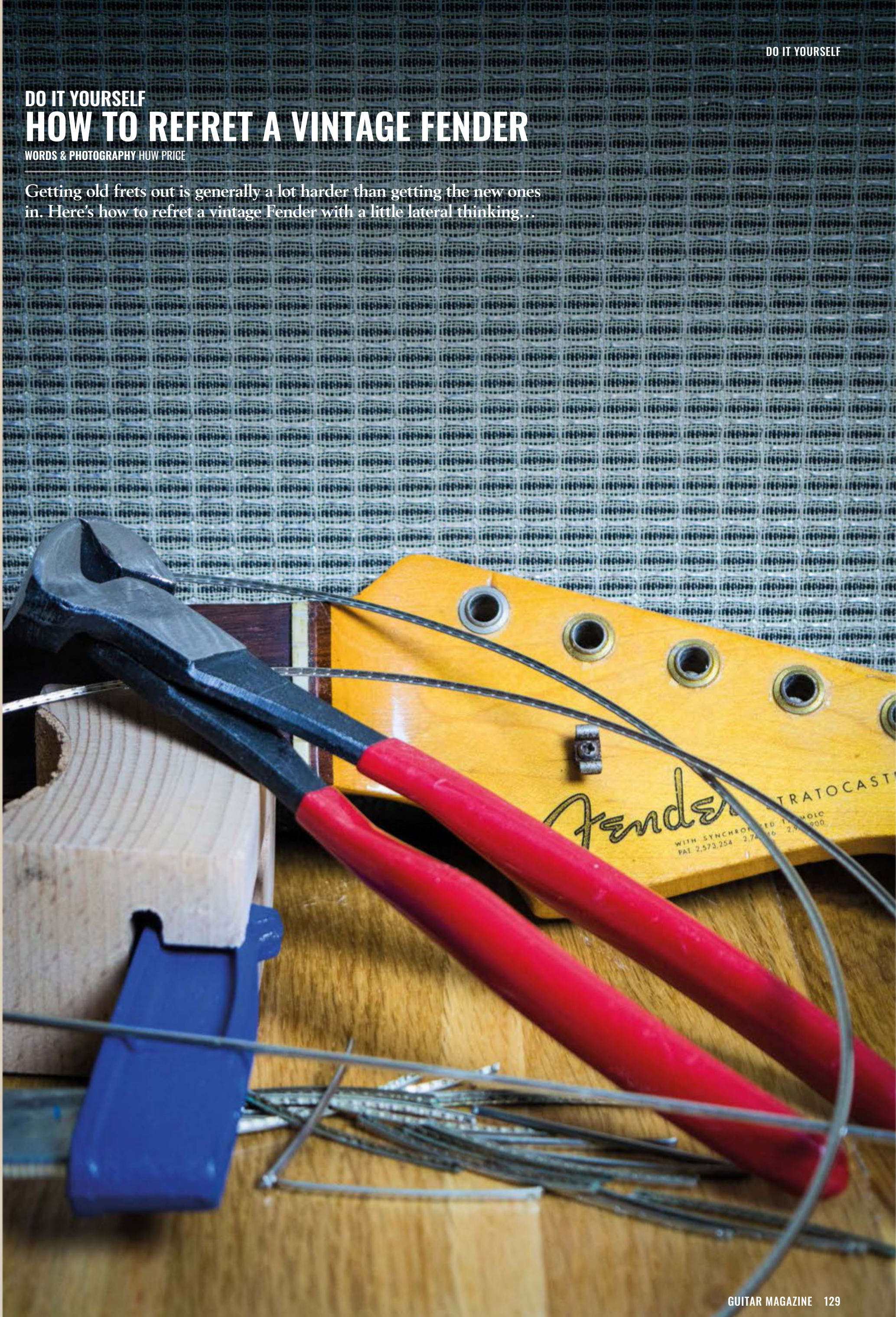
Featuring East Indian Rosewood Back & Sides. Solid Spruce Top. Built in Fishman F1 Aura Plus Pickup System. Hard Case Inc.

DO IT YOURSELF

HOW TO REFRET A VINTAGE FENDER

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Getting old frets out is generally a lot harder than getting the new ones in. Here's how to refret a vintage Fender with a little lateral thinking…



Prior to the mid 1980s, Fender used a machine that installed frets sideways. Rather than hammering or pressing them into the fingerboard in the traditional way, they were inserted at the bass side of the 'board before being pulled through the slot using a foot-operated device.

Doubtless this was one of Leo Fender's ideas for streamlining production and dispensing with the need for specialist workers, but it's important to consider if you're planning on replacing the factory frets of any Fender guitar or bass made before 1982 – or indeed, 1985, according to some accounts.

If you attempt to pull the frets out in the usual way, you're likely to do a lot more damage to the fingerboard than you'd expect during a non-Fender fret extraction.

Fretwire has a curved section on the top, known as the crown. It's the part that remains visible when the frets are installed. Beneath that, there's a thin section known as the tang, which is intended to sit inside the fret slot. Along the sides of this tang are barbs, which grip the sides of the fret slot so the fret remains firmly seated.

Tapping the frets in sideways allows the barbs to cut tiny channels along the sides of the fret slots. Because the barbs were never tapped through the wood from the top, they will simply tear out the sides of the slot if you try to pull them out. If vintage Fender frets went in sideways, they have to come out sideways, too…

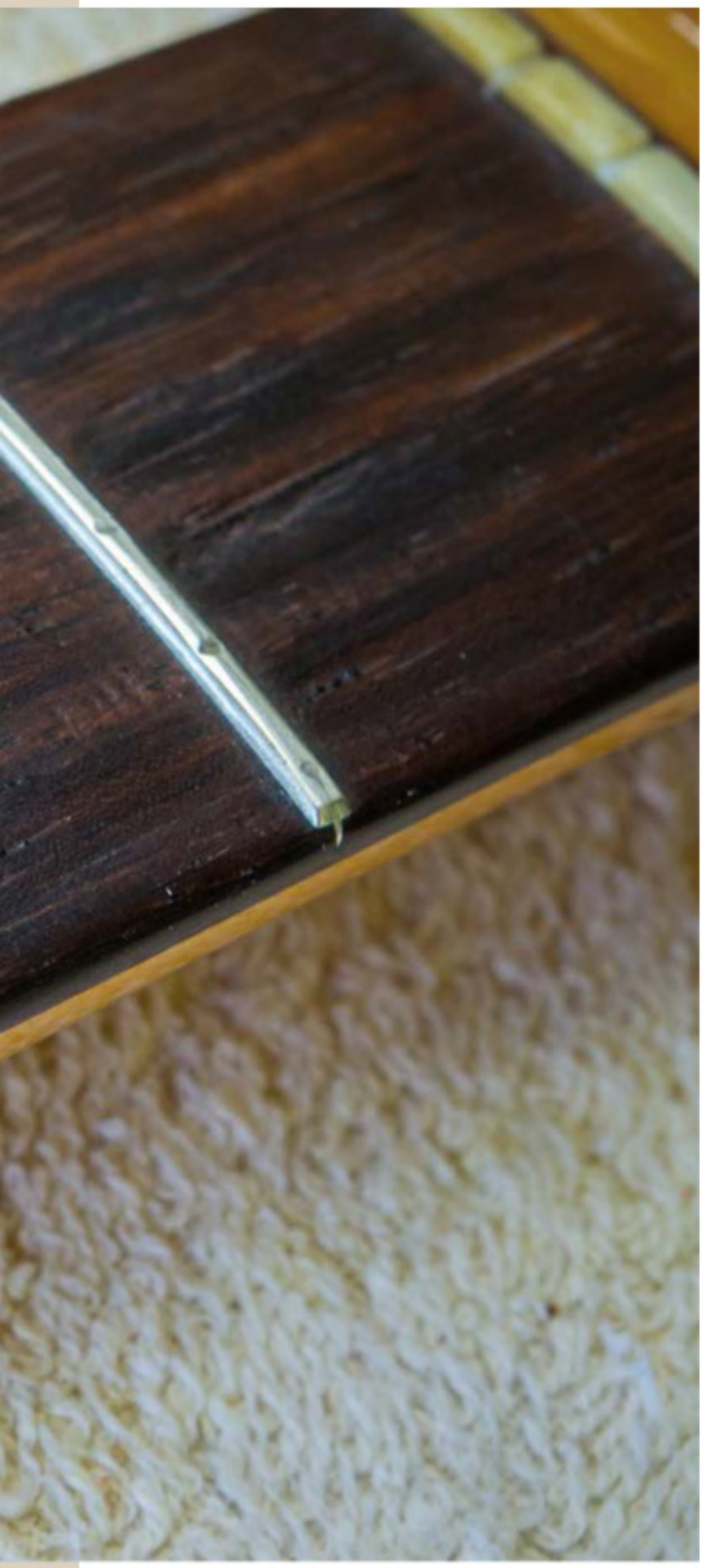
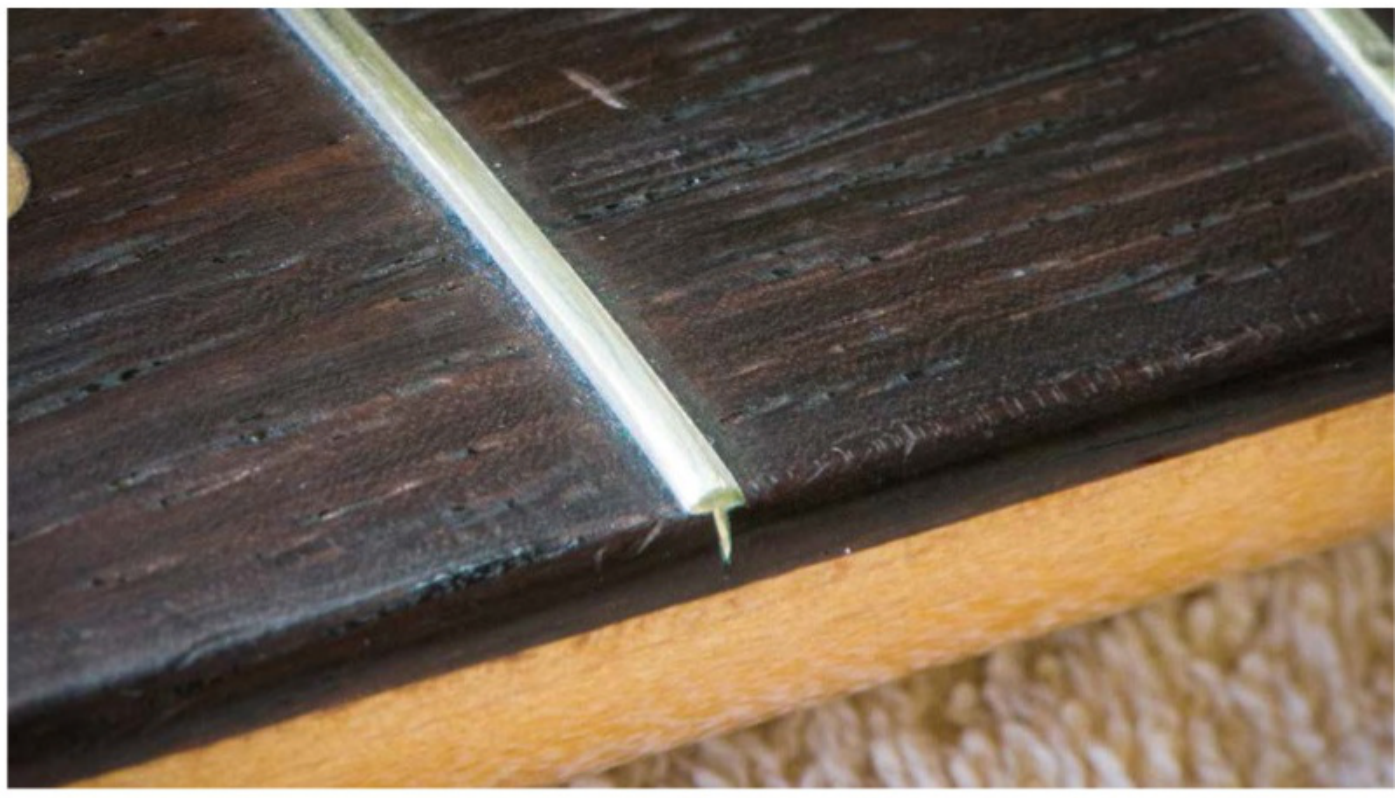
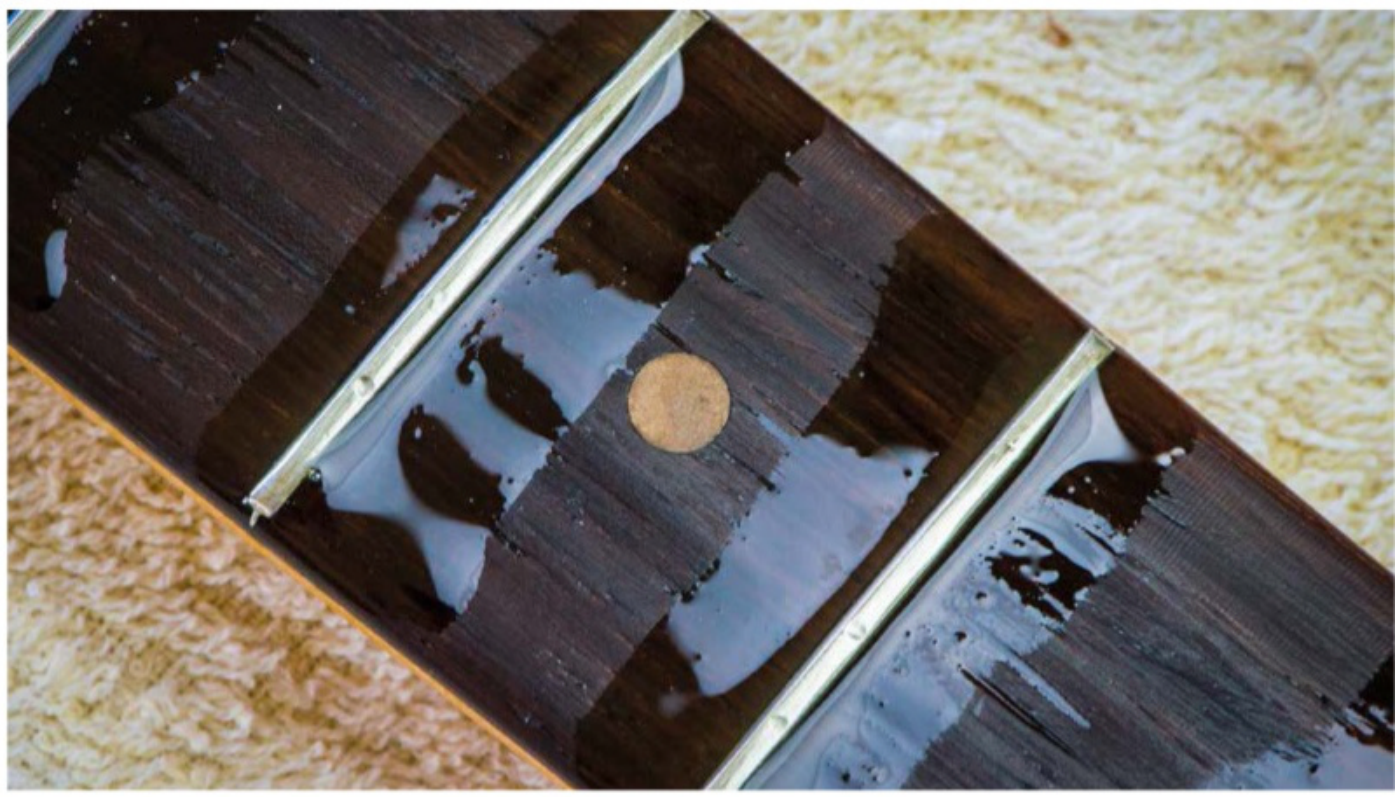
IMMACULATE EXTRACTION

The Stratocaster neck I'm working on is date-stamped December 1963. The first task is to establish that the fretwire is original to the guitar, but happily, there are some clues to suggest it is.

The fretwire is 0.08 inches, which is the correct width for vintage Fender wire. In addition, the fingerboard is in perfect condition, so there's no evidence of a refret. I can also see that the fret tangs are sharpened on the treble side, which was apparently Fender-factory practice for sideways fretting. I begin by cleaning the 'board with naphtha and then allowing lemon oil to soak in around the frets. Wood can become quite flaky over the decades, so moistening the rosewood with oil might help to prevent chipping.

Various methods are suggested for sideways fret removal. Some luthiers use a sharp flathead screwdriver and others prefer a nail punch. I'm concerned about tools such as that slipping off a fret and gouging the fingerboard, so I follow a slightly different route.

With a 1.5mm drill bit, I very carefully and slowly drill a small indent into each fret on the bass side of the 'board. To prevent the bit from slipping, I hold the drill fairly upright and the indents are just sufficient in diameter to provide a firm footing for my nail punch.

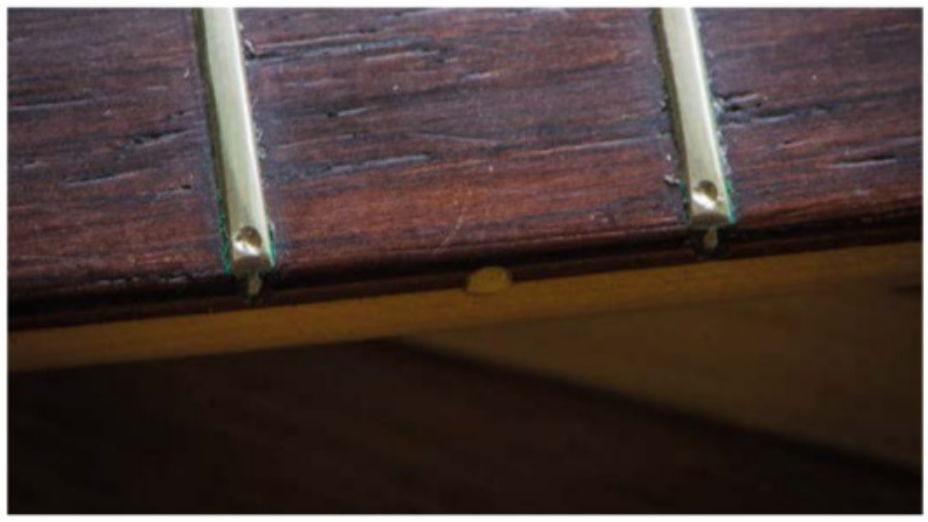
You can clamp or brace the neck for the next part. I place the nail punch tip into an indent, angle it so it's pointing towards the treble side and begin tapping gently with a small hammer.



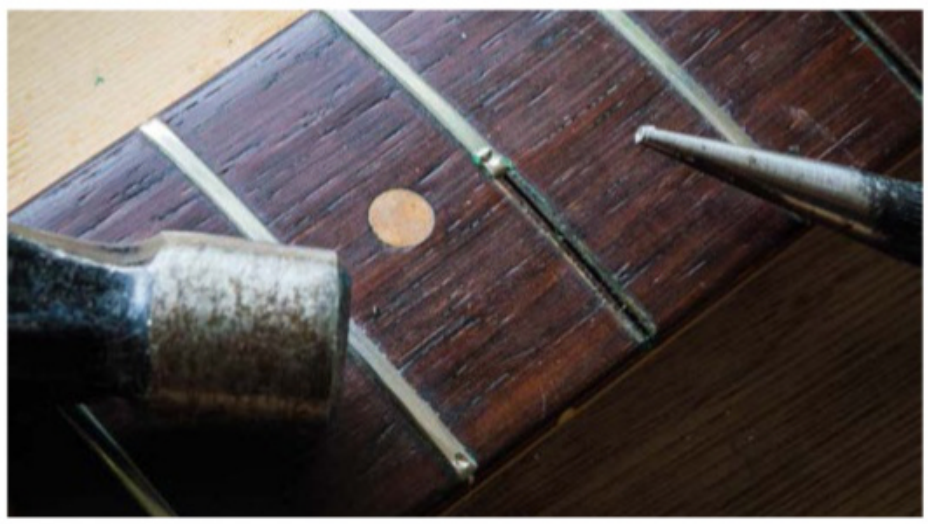
It's perhaps unsurprising that some frets move easily, while others are more stubborn. Some people recommend heating the frets with a soldering iron, which is something I always do for fret extractions. Unfortunately, heating actually makes these Fender frets harder to tap out and after a couple of messy attempts, I revert to gentle persuasion and patience.

Although most frets take a while to begin moving, once started, they slide easily. Care must be taken at the exit point, because it's easy for the rosewood to split at the opening of the slots. If you get chips at the ends or top of the slots, apply water-thin Super Glue immediately and allow it to harden. It will look a terrible mess, but the repaired areas should be invisible once they're sanded smooth.

FEELING FLAT

Plenty of guitar repairers like to sand fingerboards perfectly flat, but with old guitars it can detract from the vintage look and feel. I'm particularly reluctant to sand





OPPOSITE The original frets are low and pitted, but this is a player-grade Strat and new frets will enhance playability

ABOVE TOP If you notice a slightly sharpened tang on the treble side of a pre-1985 Fender neck, they're probably sideways installed factory frets

ABOVE The rosewood is rather dry, so lemon oil is allowed to seep in around the frets in the hope of minimising chips when they come out

LEFT TOP A 1.5mm drill bit is used to make notches at the end of the frets on the bass side

LEFT BOTTOM The notches provide a footing for a nail punch and a small hammer is used to drive the fret sideways out of the slot

ABOVE There's a tiny bit of chip out on the treble side of the fret slot, but otherwise it's in perfect condition

RIGHT TOP Progress is rapid and the green oxide left behind by the extracted frets can be wiped off with naphtha

RIGHT BOTTOM All the frets are out, the 'board is ready for refretting and we're aiming for a neck that looks vintage but plays like new

OPPOSITE The barbs are filed off the short piece of wire's tang and the end of the prepped fret is tapped in

veneer 'boards on vintage Fenders, because the wood is so thin to begin with.

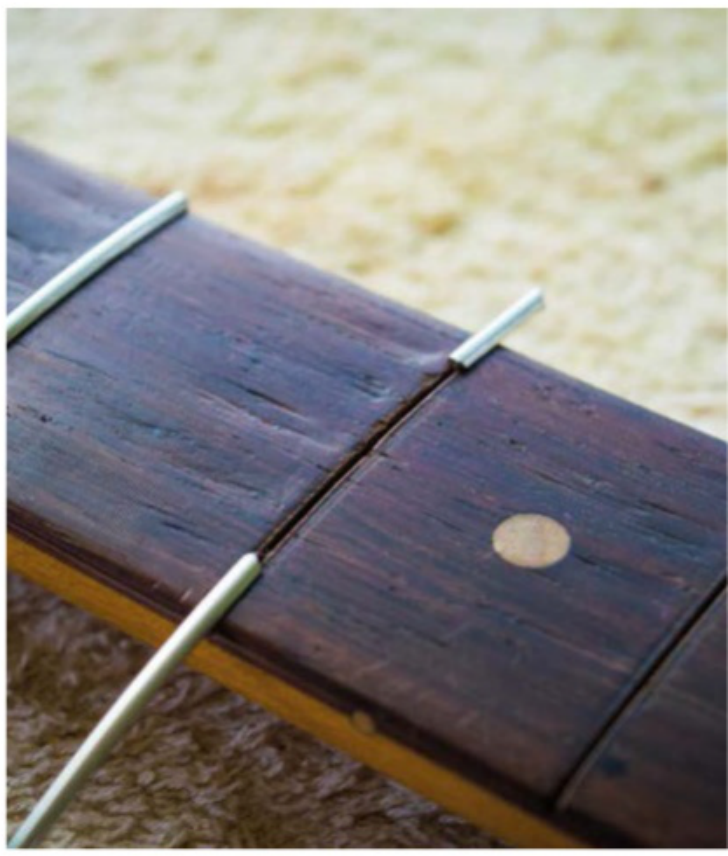
This neck is straight and the 'board is fairly flat, so my preference is to install frets that are slightly taller and level out any imperfections by removing metal rather than wood. Here, I'm only going to sand the Super Glue repairs flat and leave as much of the original playing surface as possible.

For this, I tape 320-grit paper to the underside of a 7.25-inch radius block, completely slacken off the truss-rod tension and work very slowly.

Once the surface feels smooth, I swap to ever-finer grades of sandpaper and work my way up to 8000-grit Micro-Mesh. The process is just the same as preparing a freshly sprayed guitar body for final polishing and the neck ends up looking and feeling as if nothing has been done to it.

ON THE WIRE

One fret has to be removed to determine which gauge of wire to buy – assuming you want to install vintage-style fretwire.



These days, many Strat players prefer bend-friendly fretwire with wider crowns, but perhaps if SRV preferred skinny frets, things might be the other way around!

With veneer 'boards, the slot depth is restricted, unless you're prepared to saw through the fingerboard and into the maple to accommodate deeper fret tangs. Slot width is important too, because if the tang of your preferred wire is too wide, it may be hard to install the frets. If you do manage to force the tangs into the slots, each slot will be pushed apart very slightly and the neck will most likely end up with a back-bow.

Vintage-style, single-action truss-rods are only designed to correct up-bows, so the guitar will not be playable. This means you need to buy fretwire with a tang that's compatible with the existing slots, or be prepared to widen and perhaps deepen the fret slots to accommodate the wire of your choice.

The factory fretwire has tang width of about 0.5mm (0.02-inches) and a tang depth of 1.22mm (0.055-inches). The owner of this particular neck wants vintage-spec frets, and Stewart-MacDonald's Medium/Medium wire (Item #0148) should go in without any need to alter the slots. The crown is very slightly wider at 2.13mm, which is ideal for concealing any slot repairs and any marks from the original frets.

GETTING READY

The 'board is looking almost perfect, but dust has become compacted in the fret slots. There are specialist tools for scraping fret slots, but I prefer to use an old veneer saw that I found in an antique shop years ago. The blade is wafer-thin and the teeth are dulled, which makes it excellent for scraping out dust without cutting into the fingerboard or inadvertently widening the slots.

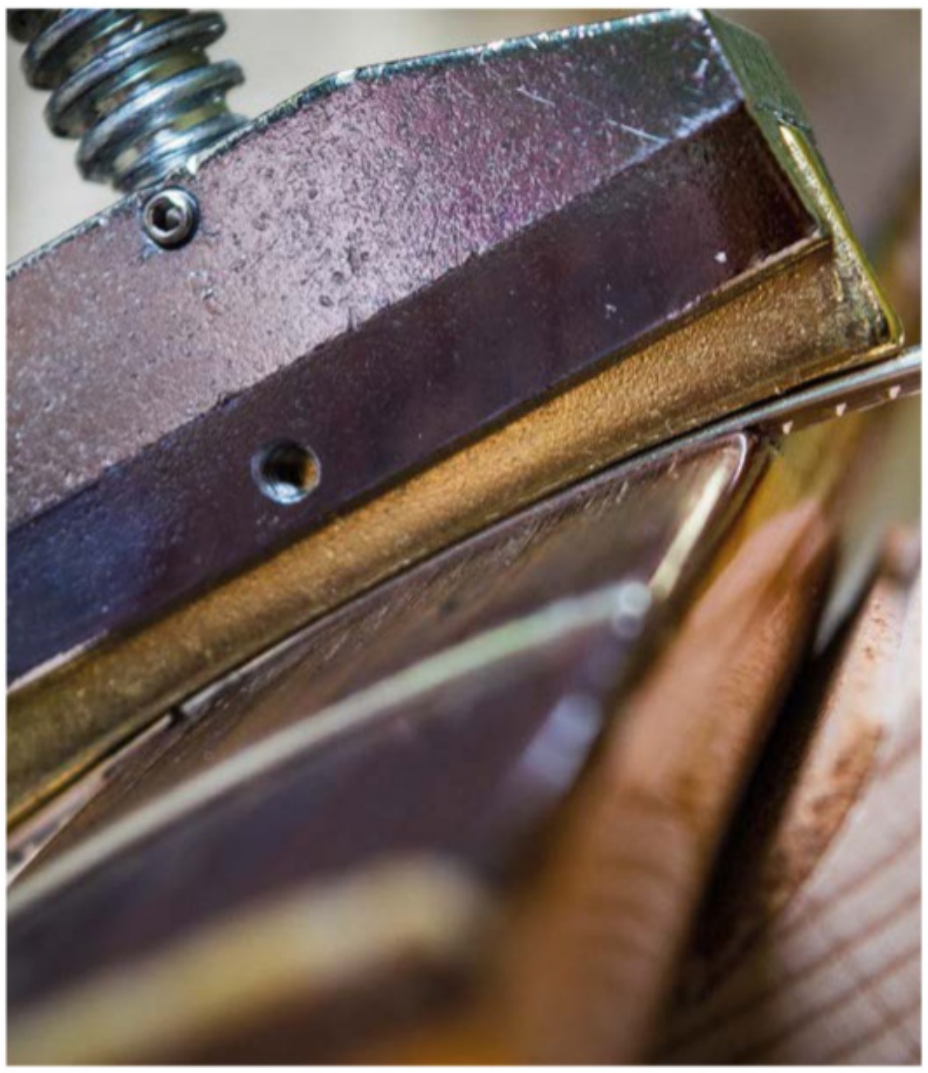
I try to be as thorough as possible when I'm cleaning fret slots, because if there's any debris, it may prevent the fret from seating properly. The corners where the tang forms right angles with the crown can be rounded rather than dead square. To compensate, you can run a triangular file across the top of each fret slot to knock off the corners. Some luthiers recommend this as a method to get frets sitting tight against the 'board.

Fretwire is extruded and oil is used in the manufacturing process. A thin coating of oil remains on the wire and it can be removed by wiping the wire with kitchen paper wetted with acetone.

ABOVE A fretting caul with a 7.25-inch radius is lightly clamped over the two pieces of wire to guide the new fret as it's being tapped in

RIGHT This fret is almost all the way in and about to push the barbless piece of wire out of the slot

OPPOSITE Although they still need a little Super Glue and end dressing, the new frets are snugly fitted in the slots

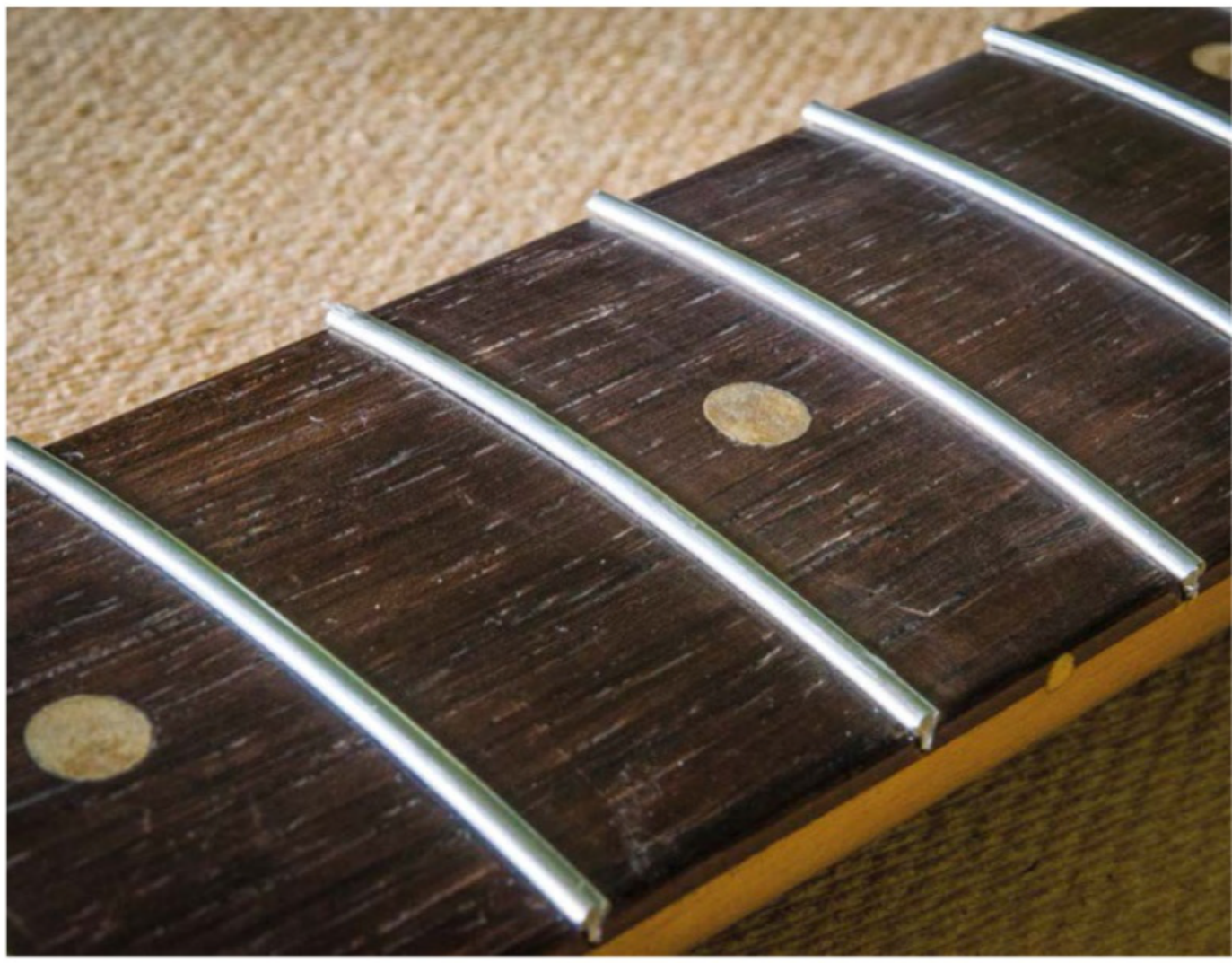


You may be surprised how dirty the paper looks once you're done. Finally, I run the fret wire through my homemade fret bender to match the fingerboard radius. It's nominally 7.25 inches, but this 'board kicks down a bit at the edges and so I radius the wire a little tighter. When you use a fret-bending device, a few centimetres at each end of the wire will remain straight. Simply snip off the straight sections, because they shouldn't be used.

NEW METAL

With everything ready, I must now decide whether to install the new frets from the top in the usual way or try and get them in sideways as Fender did. Using the modern method makes sense because any decent luthier somewhere down the line will realise that the guitar has been refretted. When it's refret time once again, these frets will come out as expected if I hammer and press them into the slots.

If I do manage to put them in sideways, the luthier is going to be in for a really



unpleasant surprise – and one that couldn't really be anticipated. On the other hand, I can't help feeling curious about giving sideways fretting a go and this is a very rare opportunity to try it. So that's what I'm going to do.

The issue is how exactly to do it. Unlike Fender, I don't have a machine for the job, so I'm going to have to improvise. I figure there are two issues to consider: keeping the fret wire low in the slot and ensuring it goes in straight.

A short while ago, I bought a cheap fret-press clamp tool via eBay. You can buy them from luthier suppliers, too, but they're a lot cheaper direct from China. The clamp has an attachment that accommodates brass cauls that are machined to various radii.

Each caul has a rounded channel milled into the mating surface that allows it to lock onto frets as they're being pressed into the slots. It's a good alternative to hammering the frets in and if you're gluing the frets, the clamping caul will secure them as the glue goes off.

I figure it might be possible to use the caul as a guide as the frets are being tapped in. I take one of my offcut lengths of fret wire and file off the barbs from the tang. This allows the wire to go in and out of the slot quite easily and I press it in on the treble side.

A section of curved wire is cut to length and I file the tang at one end to create a sharp leading edge. I also round off the underside of the crown at the same end and tap the wire into the slot at the bass side, so it has a 1cm head start.

Next, I tighten the caul over the two pieces of fretwire, applying just enough pressure to guide the wire without inhibiting movement. Tapping the protruding end of the wire gently with a small hammer, I'm delighted to find the wire travels easily through the slot.

As the wire reaches the treble side, it pushes out the offcut, eventually emerging from the treble side of the slot. The caul is removed and the excess wire removed with end nippers.

The fret is tight against the 'board and feels very solid. I run some Super Glue into the ends as a precaution, while pressing the fret down with the caul.

It may sound complicated, but once I get used to it, I find that sideways fret installation doesn't take that much longer than usual. With all the frets installed, I still need to file the ends, then level and crown, but that's a subject for another day.

Overall, removing the frets sideways is likely to result in fewer fretboard chips and the fret slots will be preserved in better condition. Whether you choose to hammer or press in the new frets, or install them sideways, it makes the job a lot easier. Unless, of course, it's a bound Fender neck. In which case, good luck with that… G

Albert King found almost infinite variety in the various shapes of the minor pentatonic by using bends and repetition

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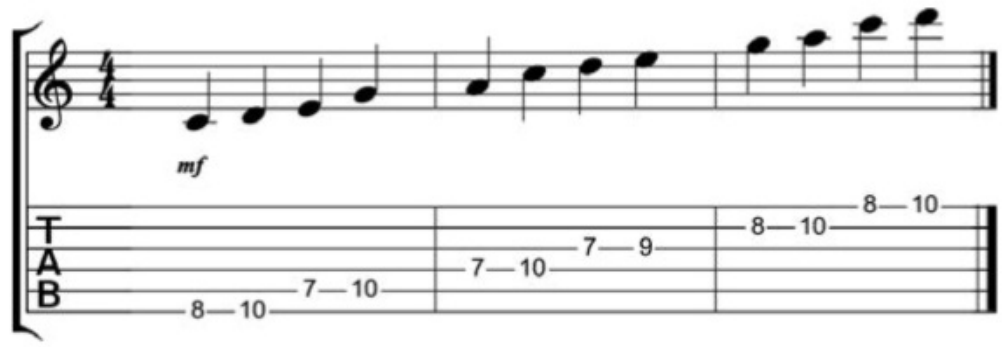
EXAMPLE 1



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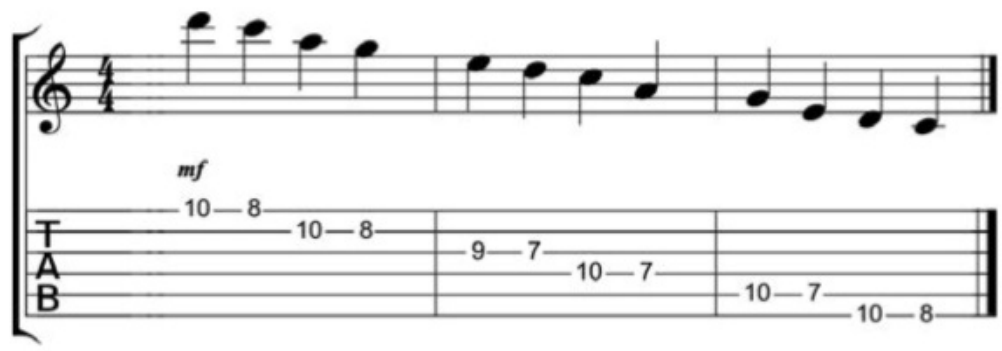
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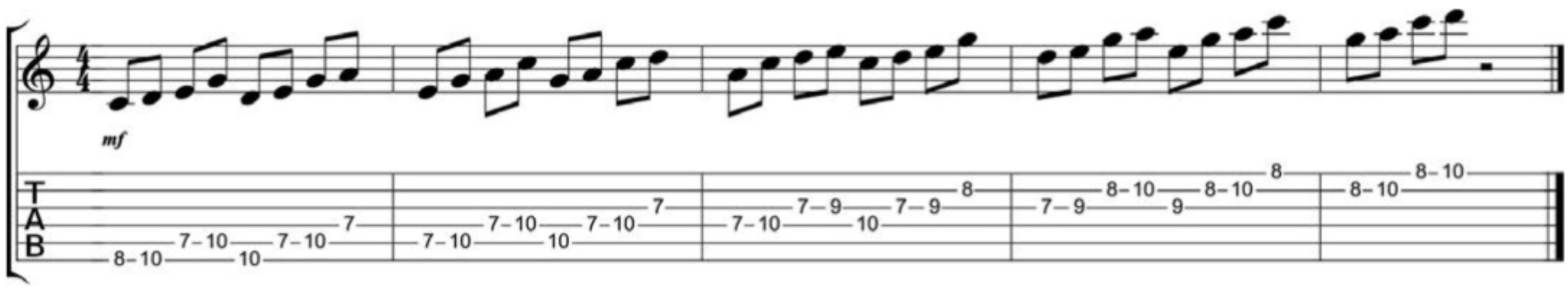

ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART NINE
THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE SHAPE 2

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

In the ninth part of our essential guide to blues playing, we're getting into the really fun stuff – expanding on the minor-pentatonic concepts we learnt back in lesson five to improve your lead vocabulary

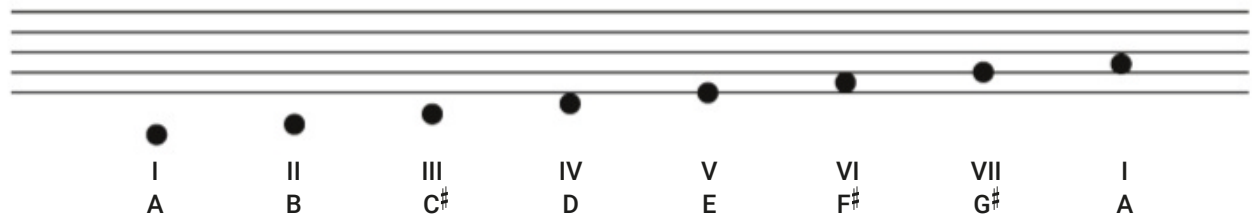
In lesson five, we discussed the importance of the minor pentatonic scale in blues music. The form of the scale we discussed in that lesson is commonly known as shape 1, or the first shape. The minor pentatonic scale exists in five shapes across the fretboard. Let's look at shape number 2.

As with the first shape, the second shape uses the same intervals pulled from the major scale. We will stay in the key of A for this.

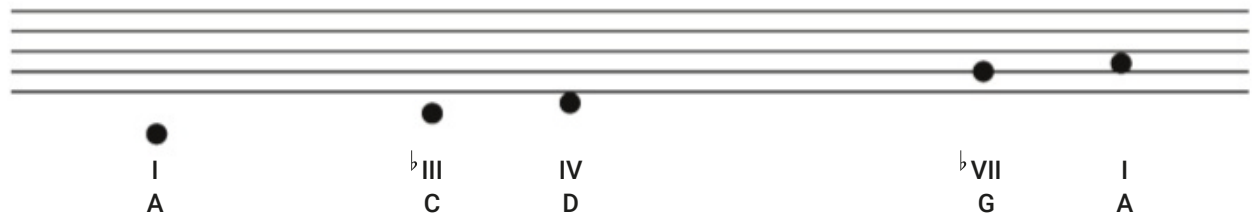
For the first shape, we start on the root note of A, but as we are now shifting this into its second shape, we will be starting on the ♭III (this will be a C note in the key of A). This will give us the same notes, but in a slightly higher register and shape (Ex 1) – and again, but descending (Ex 2).

As with shape one, it's good practice to play the scales in ascending and descending four-note groupings, just to help your fingers start to gain some speed when playing through unfamiliar patterns. The risk of practising this and any other scale in just its standard scalic form is that when

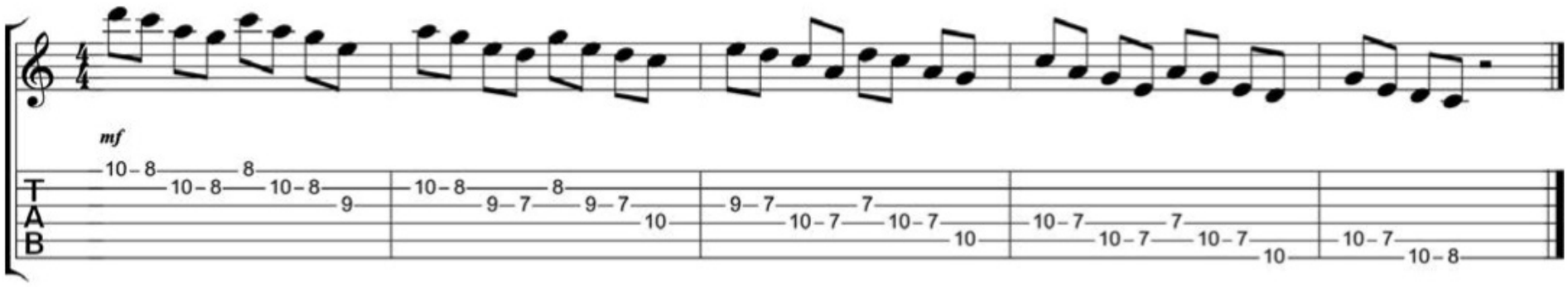
A MAJOR SCALE



A MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE



EXAMPLE 4



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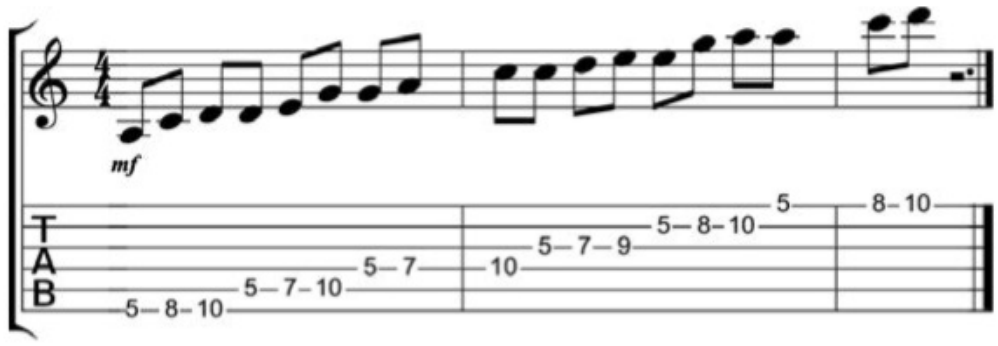
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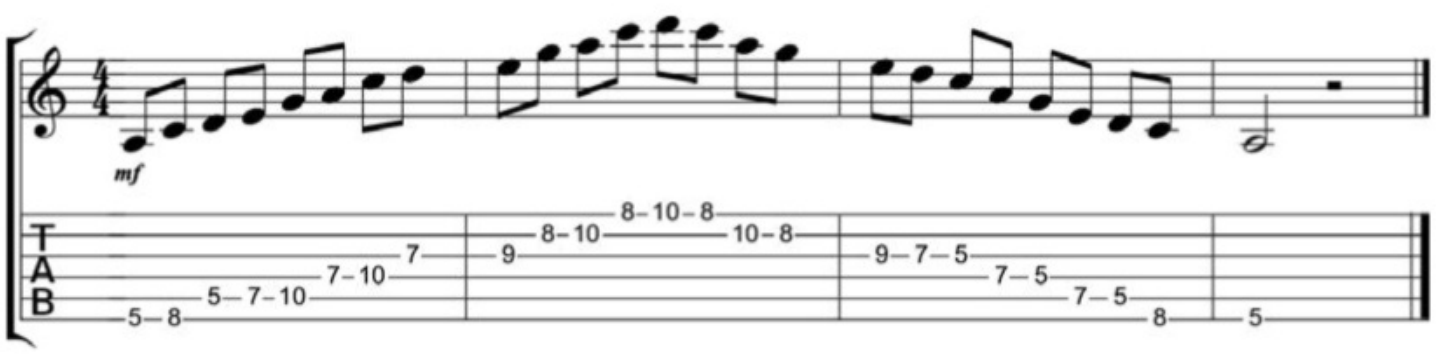
you come to use it in an improvisational sense, you will only have visualised the scale running in a straight ascending or descending manner. Breaking it up into smaller groups allows you to start to flow between notes more easily.

When it comes to seeing how this scale fits, you can imagine it as an extension of the first shape. You would not play it in this manner as a 'scale', but for the purpose of visualising this, Ex 5 is how it would look.

You can see how the first shape and the second shape share some common notes. This principle will be true of every other shape across the pentatonic scale. It's also useful, although initially trickier, to attempt to combine the two shapes. This is something that comes with practice, but at this early stage it could be useful as another way of helping you visualise how this second shape connects to the first (Ex 6).

You can see with this idea that the ascending run and the descending run are both phrased differently but you will hear a lot of the notes are the same. For instance, the 10th fret on the fifth (A) string is the same as the 5th fret on the fourth (D) string. Playing the same notes in different positions can inform how you phrase that segment of what you are doing.

This principle will become very useful when we dig into more in-depth improvisational techniques.

TRY IT YOURSELF

The layout of the guitar fretboard allows scale shapes to be transposed around the guitar at will. The shape in this lesson is in A minor, but this can be moved to any other key around the fretboard. When transposing the second shape, don't forget that it's relative to the root note of the first shape. This means when moving it into another key, you will be starting from the second note of the initial shape.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He's taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. To find a qualified guitar tutor in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

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Unlock the secrets of Arctic Monkeys' compelling chordal riffery with our lesson

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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY ARCTIC MONKEYS-STYLE CHORDS

WORDS ROD FOGG

We take a look at chord sequences inspired by Alex Turner and Jamie Cook and find that they tend to be anything but predictable…

Many Arctic Monkeys songs are riff-based, and one way to add power to a riff is to slide around a five chord instead of using single notes. In figure 1, for example, the first three chords are played in one bar – try it with a triplet-style three-against-two rhythm. Play this twice and then answer it with C5, E♭5 and F♯5, also played twice, in the same rhythm. The F♯ chord seems very intense in this situation because it is built on the augmented fourth above the keynote C, which is one of the most dissonant intervals. It sounds intense and, as we mentioned, unpredictable, too.

With two six-strings in the lineup, there are often single notes on guitar one mixed with chords on guitar two. However, in something like figure 1, we would envision both guitars playing the same riff in unison, mixed left and right for added weight. If you're trying to recreate this, aim for a different sound on each guitar; thick and dark on one, thin and bright on the other.

Figure 2 introduces some strummed, clean chords. Play the D and C♯m in bar 1 and let the Bm ring for all of bar 2. This part represents a verse, and might well seem to be in the key of either D major or B minor. However, for the 'chorus', things are neither dynamically loud nor heavy: we carry on with the clean chiming chords and play A, C♯m, Bm and E, one bar per chord. You can try slipping in a C minor passing chord between the C♯m and Bm. This sequence is actually in A major.

A feature of Arctic Monkeys' style is the placing of 'stab' chords on beats two and four, often while the other guitar and bass play a unison riff, or sometimes to add a spiky rhythm to strummed chords. Figure 3 is an example of this – it is played using down strokes on beats two and four with the fret-hand fingers released immediately after each stroke to create a staccato effect. Just release the pressure, don't actually take your fingers off of the strings and you'll stop the sound instantly. Notice that the voicings are all quite high, being placed on the top four strings to help them cut through.

The first chord is technically E/G♯, or 'E with G♯ bass', but if you had the bass playing the low E, the root note of this chord is effectively E, and so we have left it described as an E chord. This chord gets a bar to itself, but the C♯m and B chords share a bar. Then play a bar of F♯m and back to

FIGURE 1

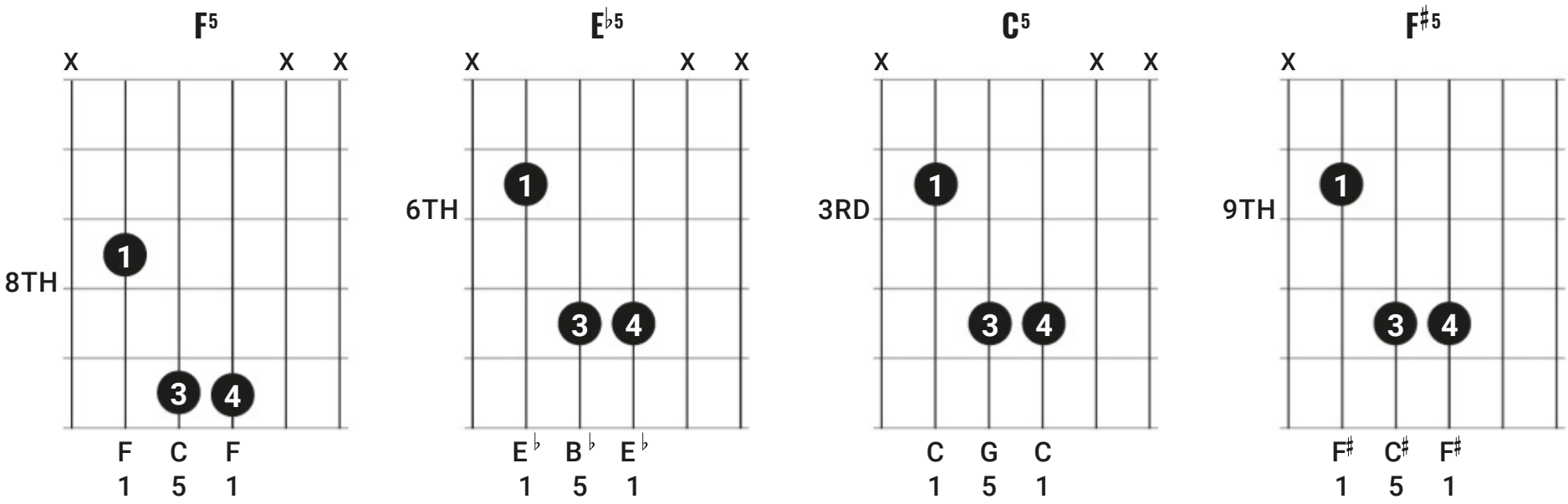
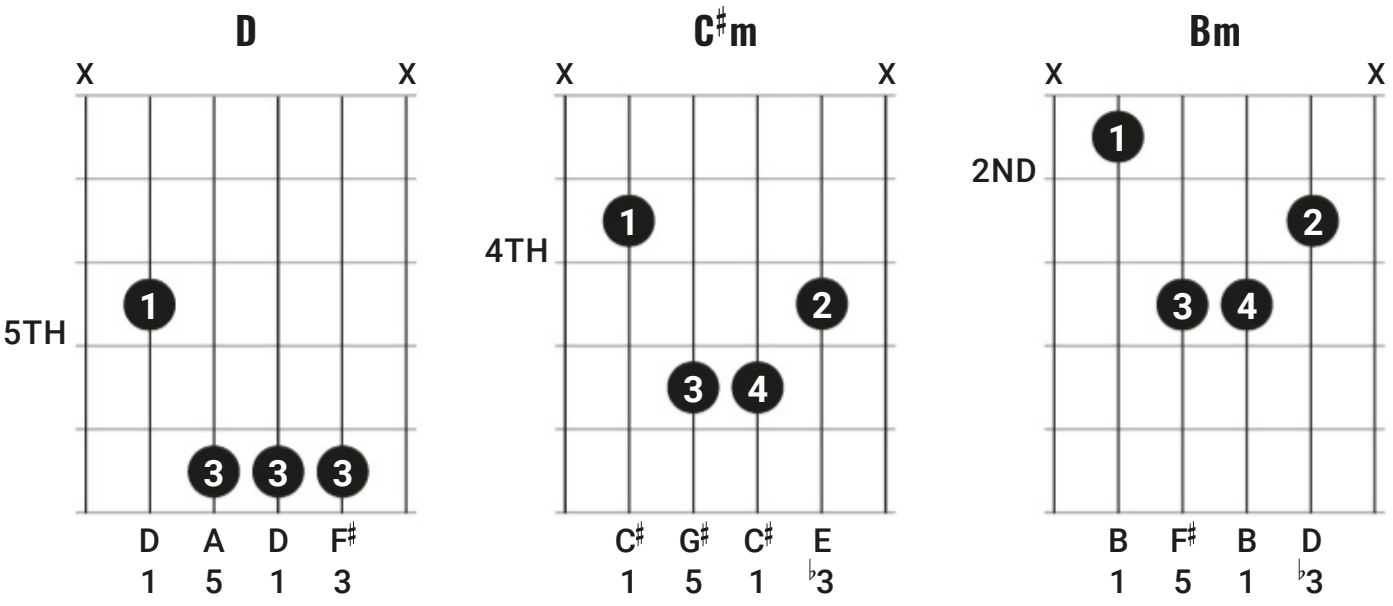


FIGURE 2



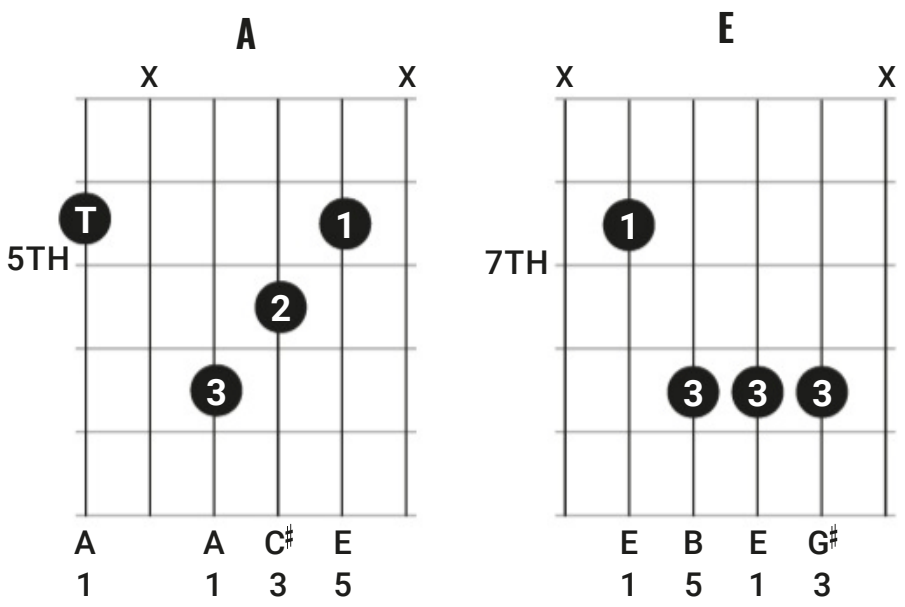
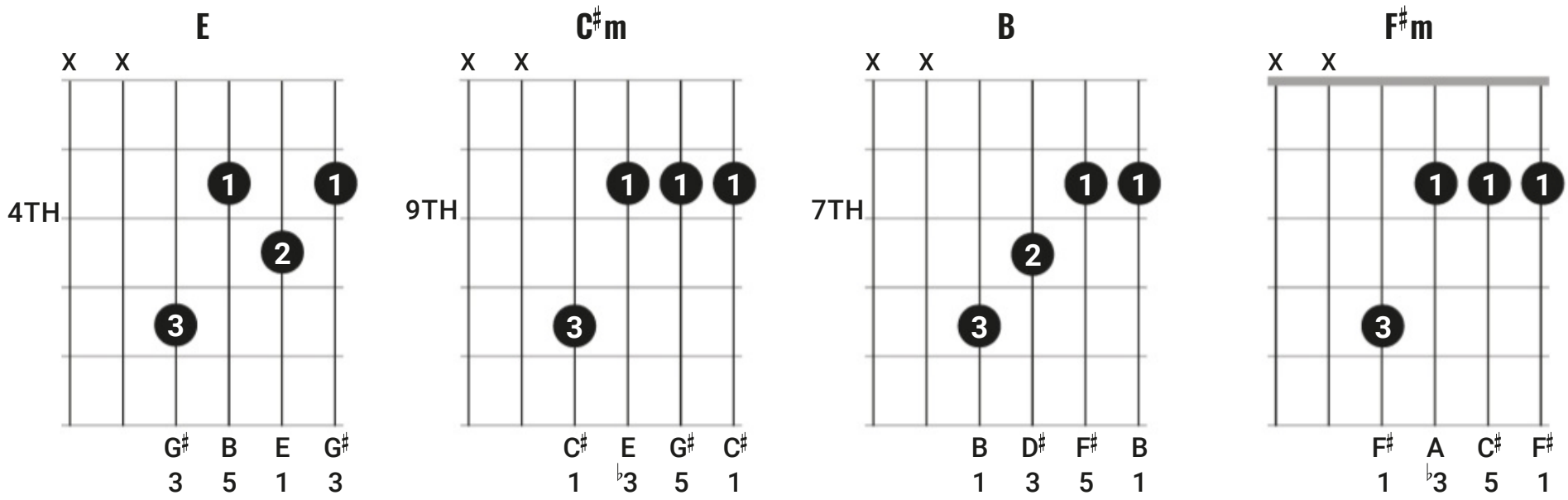


FIGURE 3



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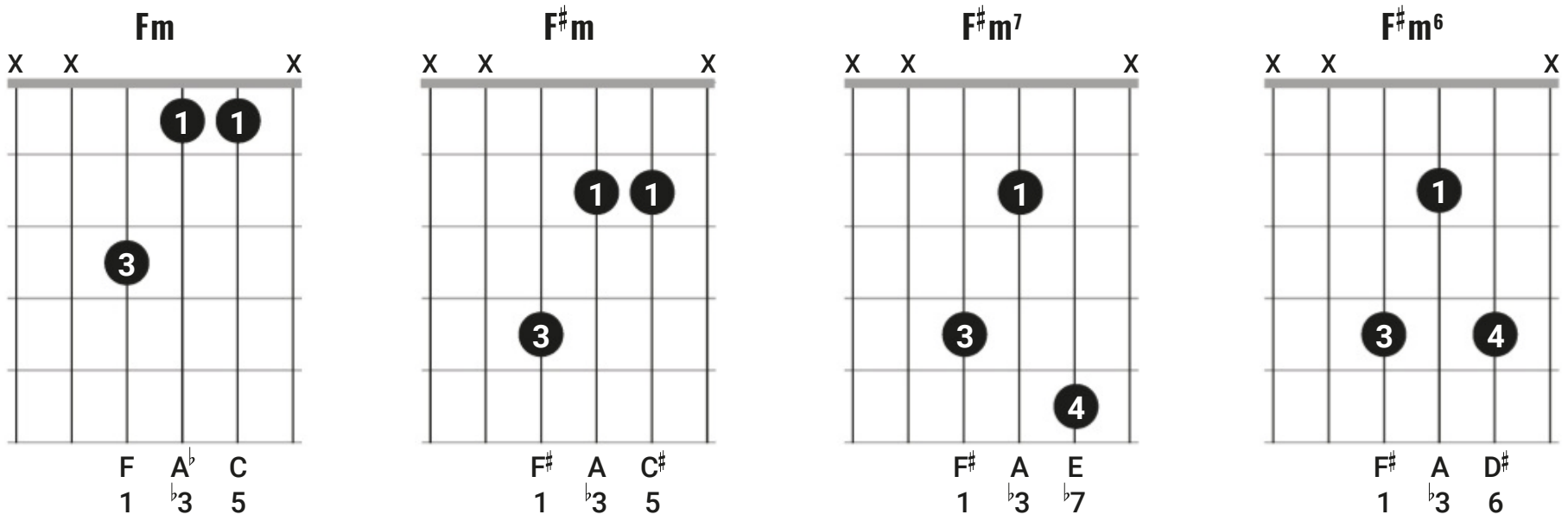
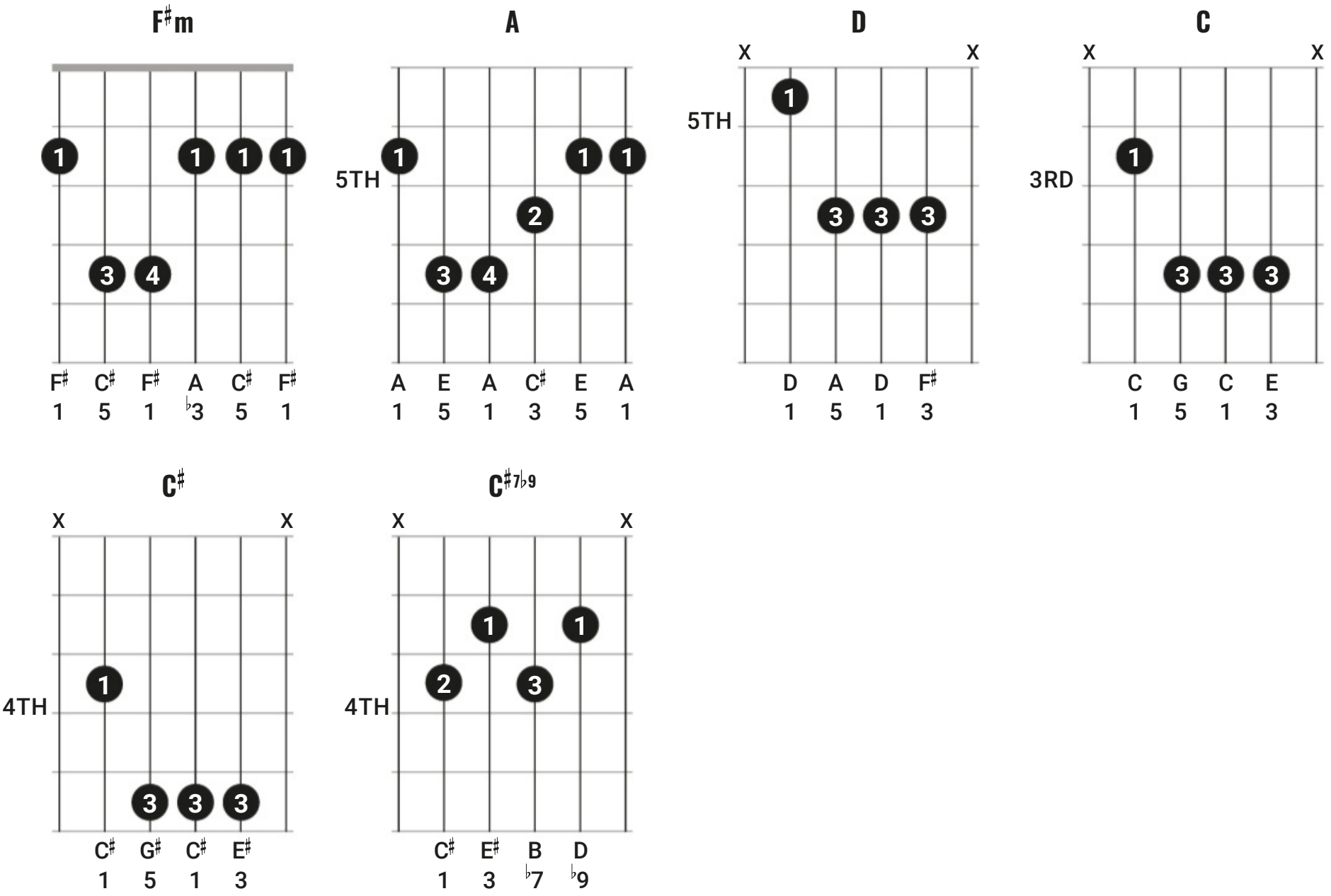


FIGURE 5



B for a four-bar sequence to loop around. Figure 4 introduces a riff based on three-note chords; the F minor chord is played at the start of the bar and immediately slid up one fret to F♯ minor. Strum this chord gently for the rest of the bar and into the second bar, adding the F♯m7 and F♯m6 on beats three and four to create a two-bar pattern. Take it slowly, sit back and let it groove as you repeat four or eight times.

Figure 5 is our idea of a chorus to figure 4 and brings about another aspect of the unexpected that we mentioned earlier. Strum the first four chords, one bar each and repeat. Does the C chord seem a little strange in context? In theory terms, it is what is known as a 'false relation'. F sharp minor, A major and D major are closely related, as all three chords can be found in the keys of both A major and D major; C major cannot be found in either of those keys and yet strangely, it works very effectively to return to F♯ minor, mainly because it is so 'out there' that our ears crave the return to the chord with which we started.

The last two chords in figure 5 are included as an experiment. These are harmonically correct, but relatively ordinary-sounding alternatives to the C major chord. C♯ is chord V, the dominant, to F♯ minor and tends to lead naturally to it; C♯7♭9 is the extended dominant chord which has the same effect, but adds an almost classical quality. Try these alternatives and see which you like most. G

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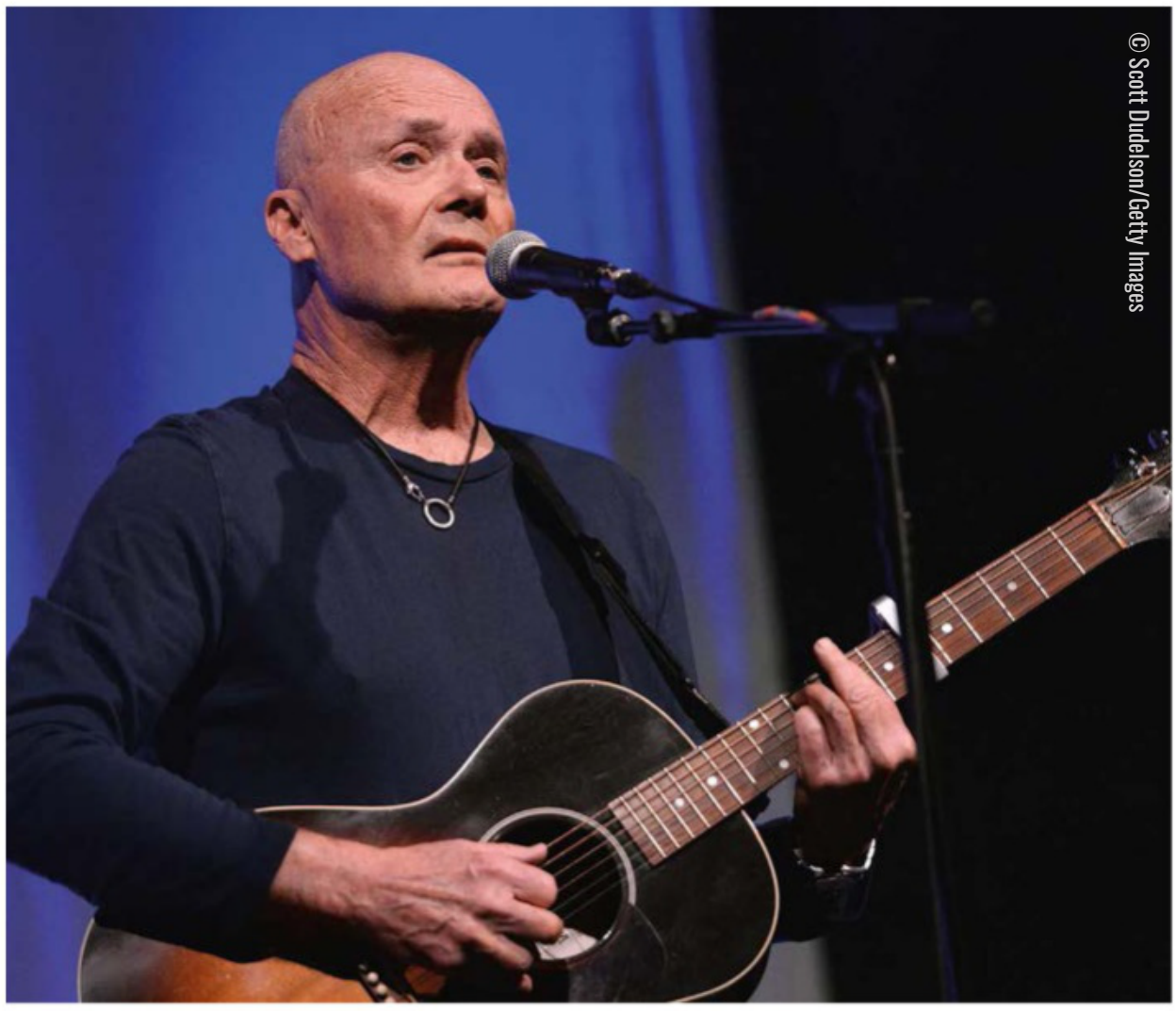
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TALKBOX

CREED BRATTON

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The star of *The Office* and one-time Grass Roots guitarist remembers dropping acid at the Miami Pop Festival, why he doesn't regret selling his '52 Tele and why he isn't going to tell the guitar companies what to do…

The moment it all started…
"I played trumpet from a very young age, and in high school, I was first chair trumpeter in my freshman year. But my grandfather played in a semi-professional country and western band down in Long Beach. He gave me an acoustic guitar and I started playing chords, but then I was in bed one night with my little crystal radio set – that's how old I am – and I hear Link Wray's *Rumble*. I hear that guitar sound, I go, 'Oh my god!'

"We were a very poor family, but I took everything I'd saved up from working and I sent away to Sears and Roebuck and got that Silvertone guitar – a Danelectro with lipstick pickups, with the guitar case that had an amp built into it.

"So I took it out to the barn, plugged it in and all the chickens went scattering, the steers were looking at me funny… but when I hit that E chord I went, 'Oh my…' and that was it! I just let that E chord reverberate through my body, and I was just a changed boy!"

I couldn't live without my…
"There's a 1957 Gibson Country Western – I record a lot with that – and then there's my '69 Guild Bluesbird. I once had a 335 and an SG stolen on the road with the Grass Roots and so I went to Manny's in New York and bought this Guild. It originally had this wooden bridge, so I put a Gibson Tune-o-matic on and I've had it ever since."

The one that got away…
"I had an old Black Beauty Les Paul, with the staple pickup, and I also had a '52 Tele, and y'know a few years back they were going for like $100,000! It used to drive me crazy that I sold them, until I got on *The Office* and then it was like, 'Well I can buy whatever I want now!' But I don't think I'd buy those guitars again now. I needed the money! I needed to pay rent, to pay child support and you gotta do what you gotta do."

My signature model…
"It would be pretty close to the way I've got the Bluesbird dialled in. It's got the mini-humbuckers on there, I've got the Tune-o-matic and I've also put on a phase switch, so I can pull up my treble volume, split the phase on the two humbuckers and get that out-of-phase sound. I'm an acoustic player, so when I'm playing lead I still want to have that woodiness to it."

My Spinal Tap moment…
"My life! It's my every Saturday night! But a great one was when the Grass Roots were playing the Miami Pop Festival in '68. 50,000 people… not a big crowd! So we do our show and then the guitar player and I dropped acid backstage just before The Turtles come out. Mark Volman at the time had a huge afro and on this occasion, he was also wearing this big chain with a big star pendant. So they're playing and he's singing with his head down into the mic and this thing is swinging like a pendulum back and forth, more and more until he gets to, 'I can't see me lovin' nobody but…' and bam, the pendant swings around and sticks in his afro… and it won't come out!

"And so he's still singing the song while he's pulling on this thing and it just won't budge… and we are at the side of the stage, crying. And then the road manager comes charging on stage with some scissors. And he's kicking the guy because he doesn't want him to cut his hair! It's the funniest thing I've ever seen."

My guilty pleasure…
"When I first heard that Katy Perry song *I Kissed A Girl*, I thought it was horrible! Horrible! But I loved it… and now I love the shit out of it. I just thought it was one of the better fuckin' pop songs that I've heard lately. I probably wouldn't normally tell people that, but hell, I love it!"

The most important thing on my rider…
"Room-temperature water. Because anytime you get to the gig, they'll have ice cold water up on the stool and you'll grab it and it's just going to fuck up your throat. So now I'm like, 'Look, I'm not gonna have the brown M&Ms taken out or anything, I just want room-temperature water and I'm fine.' I'm a simple man!"

I wish I could play…
"I don't think there's anything, technically. But there are times where I listen to Issa Bagayogo and it's just one chord… but what a groove! I used to listen to it back in the 70s and there's something about it that makes me just want to shake my tired old atrophied butt, y'know?!" G

Creed Bratton tours the UK in September 2019. For more info, see creedbratton.com

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